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BUILDERS OF THE NATION

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From the Indian Trail to the Railroad

National Edition

Complete in Twelve Volumes



SAMPLE IN TWELVE VOLUMES

Builders of Nation

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On the Way to the Traps.

From an original painting by D. C. Hutchison.

NATIONAL EDITION
COMPLETE IN TWELVE VOLUMES

Builders of the Nation

THE TRAPPER

I

By

A. C. Laut

Author of *Heralds of Empire*, etc.



ILLUSTRATED

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I.—GAMESTERS OF THE WILDERNESS	1
II.—THREE COMPANIES IN CONFLICT	8
III.—THE NOR' WESTERS' COUP	22
IV.—THE ANCIENT HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY WAKENS UP	28
V.—MR. ASTOR'S COMPANY ENCOUNTERS NEW OP- PONENTS	38
VI.—THE FRENCH TRAPPER	50
VII.—THE BUFFALO-RUNNERS	65
VIII.—THE MOUNTAINEERS	81
IX.—THE TAKING OF THE BEAVER	102
X.—THE MAKING OF THE MOCCASINS	117
XI.—THE INDIAN TRAPPER	128

Trapper. I.



LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

ON THE WAY TO THE TRAPS	FRONTISPICE
<i>From an Original Painting by D. C. Hutchison.</i>	
	PAGE
INDIAN VOYAGEURS "PACKING" OVER LONG PORTAGE	30
TRADERS RUNNING A MACKINAW OR KEEL-BOAT DOWN THE RAPIDS	57
THE BUFFALO-HUNT	78
WITH EYE AND EAR ALERT THE MAN PADDLES SI- LENTLY ON	105
THEY DODGE THE COMING SWEEP OF THE UPLIFTED ARM	143

Trapper. I.

TO ALL WHO KNOW
THE GIPSY YEARNING FOR THE WILDS



EDITOR'S PREFACE

THE picturesque figure of the trapper follows close behind the Indian in the unfolding of the panorama of the West. There is the explorer, but the trapper himself preceded the explorers—witness Lewis's and Clark's meetings with trappers on their journey. The trapper's hard-earned knowledge of the vast empire lying beyond the Missouri was utilized by later comers, or in a large part died with him, leaving occasional records in the documents of fur companies, or reports of military expeditions, or here and there in the name of a pass, a stream, a mountain, or a fort. His adventurous warfare upon the wild things of the woods and streams was the expression of a primitive instinct old as the history of mankind. The development of the motives which led the first pioneer trappers afield from the days of the first Eastern settlements, the industrial organizations which followed, the commanding commercial results which were evolved from the trafficking of Radisson and Groseilliers in the

North, the rise of the great Hudson's Bay Company, and the American enterprise which led, among other results, to the foundation of the Astor fortunes, would form no inconsiderable part of a history of North America. The present volume aims simply to show the type-character of the Western trapper, and to sketch in a series of pictures the checkered life of this adventurer of the wilderness.

The trapper of the early West was a composite figure. From the Northeast came a splendid succession of French explorers like La Verendrye, with *coureurs des bois*, and a multitude of daring trappers and traders pushing west and south. From the south the Spaniard, illustrated in figures like Garces and others, held out hands which rarely grasped the waiting commerce. From the north and northeast there was the steady advance of the sturdy Scotch and English, typified in the deeds of the Henrys, Thompson, MacKenzie, and the leaders of the organized fur trade, explorers, traders, captains of industry, carrying the flags of the Hudson's Bay and North-West Fur companies across Northern America to the Pacific. On the far Northwestern coast the Russian appeared as fur trader in the middle of the eighteenth century, and the close of the century saw the merchants of Boston claiming their share of the fur traffic of that coast. The American trapper becomes a conspicuous figure in the early years of the nineteenth century. The emporium of his traffic was

St. Louis, and the period of its greatest importance and prosperity began soon after the Louisiana Purchase and continued for forty years. The complete history of the American fur trade of the far West has been written by Captain H. M. Chittenden in volumes which will be included among the classics of early Western history. Although his history is a publication designed for limited circulation, no student or specialist in this field can fail to appreciate the value of his faithful and comprehensive work.

In *The Story of the Trapper* there is presented for the general reader a vivid picture of an adventurous figure, which is painted with a singleness of purpose and a distinctness impossible of realization in the large and detailed histories of the American fur trade and the Hudson's Bay and North-West companies, or the various special relations and journals and narratives. The author's wilderness lore and her knowledge of the life, added to her acquaintance with its literature, have borne fruit in a personification of the Western and Northern trappers who live in her pages. It is the man whom we follow not merely in the evolution of the Western fur traffic, but also in the course of his strange life in the wilds, his adventures, and the contest of his craft against the cunning of his quarry. It is a most picturesque figure which is sketched in these pages with the etcher's art that selects essentials while boldly disregarding details. This figure as it is outlined here

will be new and strange to the majority of readers, and the relish of its piquant flavour will make its own appeal. A strange chapter in history is outlined for those who would gain an insight into the factors which had to do with the building of the West. Woodcraft, exemplified in the calling of its most skilful devotees, is painted in pictures which breathe the very atmosphere of that life of stream and forest which has not lost its appeal even in these days of urban centralization. The flash of the paddle, the crack of the rifle, the stealthy tracking of wild beasts, the fearless contest of man against brute and savage, may be followed throughout a narrative which is constant in its fresh and personal interest.

The Hudson's Bay Company still flourishes, and there is still an American fur trade; but the golden days are past, and the heroic age of the American trapper in the West belongs to a bygone time. Even more than the cowboy, his is a fading figure, dimly realized by his successors. It is time to tell his story, to show what manner of man he was, and to preserve for a different age the adventurous character of a Romany of the wilderness, fascinating in the picturesqueness and daring of his primeval life, and also, judged by more practical standards, a figure of serious historical import in his relations to exploration and commerce, and even affairs of politics and state.

If, therefore, we take the trapper as a typical figure

in the early exploitation of an empire, his larger significance may be held of far more consequence to us than the excesses and lawlessness so frequent in his life. He was often an adventurer pure and simple. The record of his dealings with the red man and with white competitors is darkened by many stains. His return from his lonely journeys afield brought an outbreak of license like that of the cowboy fresh from the range, but with all this the stern life of the old frontier bred a race of men who did their work. That work was the development of the only natural resources of vast regions in this country and to the Northward, which were utilized for long periods. There was also the task of exploration, the breaking the way for others, and as pioneer and as builder of commerce the trapper's part in our early history has a significance which cloaks the frailties characteristic of restraintless life in untrodden wilds.



THE STORY OF THE TRAPPER

PART I

CHAPTER I

GAMESTERS OF THE WILDERNESS

FEARING nothing, stopping at nothing, knowing no law, ruling his stronghold of the wilds like a despot, checkmating rivals with a deviltry that beggars parallel, wassailing with a shamelessness that might have put Rome's worst deeds to the blush, fighting—fighting—fighting, always fighting with a courage that knew no truce but victory, the American trapper must ever stand as a type of the worst and the best in the militant heroes of mankind.

Each with an army at his back, Wolfe and Napoleon won victories that upset the geography of earth. The fur traders never at any time exceeded a few thousands in number, faced enemies unbacked by armies and sallied out singly or in pairs; yet they won a continent that has bred a new race.

Like John Colter,* whom Manuel Lisa met coming from the wilds a hundred years ago, the trapper strapped a pack to his back, slung a rifle over his shoul-

* Whom Bradbury and Irving and Chittenden have all conspired to make immortal.

der, and, without any fanfare of trumpets, stepped into the pathless shade of the great forests. Or else, like Williams of the Arkansas, the trapper left the moorings of civilization in a canoe, hunted at night, hid himself by day, evaded hostile Indians by sliding down-stream with muffled paddles, slept in mid-current screened by the branches of driftwood, and if a sudden halloo of marauders came from the distance, cut the strap that held his craft to the shore and got away under cover of the floating tree. Hunters crossing the Cimarron desert set out with pack-horses, and, like Captain Becknell's party, were often compelled to kill horses and dogs to keep from dying of thirst. Frequently their fate was that of Rocky Mountain Smith, killed by the Indians as he stooped to scoop out a drinking-hole in the sand. Men who brought down their pelts to the mountain *rendezvous* of Pierre's Hole, or went over the divide like Fraser and Thompson of the North-West Fur Company, had to abandon both horses and canoes, scaling cañon walls where the current was too turbulent for a canoe and the precipice too sheer for a horse, with the aid of their hunting-knives stuck in to the haft.* Where the difficulties were too great for a few men, the fur traders clubbed

* While Lewis and Clark were on the Upper Missouri, the former had reached a safe footing along a narrow pass, when he heard a voice shout, "Good God, captain, what shall I do?" Turning, Lewis saw Windsor had slipped to the verge of a precipice, where he lay with right arm and leg over it, the other arm clinging for dear life to the bluff. With his hunting-knife he cut a hole for his right foot, ripped off his moccasins so that his toes could have the prehensile freedom of a monkey's tail, and thus crawled to safety like a fly on a wall.

together under a master-mind like John Jacob Astor of the Pacific Company, or Sir Alexander MacKenzie of the Nor' Westers. Banded together, they thought no more of coasting round the sheeted antarctics, or slipping down the ice-jammed current of the MacKenzie River under the midnight sun of the arctic circle, than people to-day think of running from New York to Newport. When the conflict of 1812 cut off communication between western fur posts and New York by the overland route, Farnham, the Green Mountain boy, didn't think himself a hero at all for sailing to Kamtchatka and crossing the whole width of Asia, Europe, and the Atlantic, to reach Mr. Astor.

The American fur trader knew only one rule of existence—to go ahead without any heroics, whether the going cost his own or some other man's life. That is the way the wilderness was won; and the winning is one of the most thrilling pages in history.

About the middle of the seventeenth century Pierre Radisson and Chouart Groseillers, two French adventurers from Three Rivers, Quebec, followed the chain of waterways from the Ottawa and Lake Superior northwestward to the region of Hudson Bay.* Returning with tales of fabulous wealth to be had in the fur trade of the north, they were taken in hand by members of the British Commission then in Boston, whose influence secured the Hudson's Bay Company charter in 1670; and that ancient and honourable body—as the company was called—reaped enormous profits from the

* Whether they actually reached the shores of the bay on this trip is still a dispute among French-Canadian savants.

bartering of pelts. But the bartering went on in a prosy, half-alive way, the traders sitting snugly in their forts on Rupert and Severn Rivers, or at York Factory (Port Nelson) and Churchill (Prince of Wales). The French governor down in Quebec issued only a limited number of licenses for the fur trade in Canada; and the old English company had no fear of rivalry in the north. It never sought inland tribes, but waited with serene apathy for the Indians to come down to its fur posts on the bay. Young Le Moyne d'Iberville * might march overland from Quebec to the bay, catch the English company nodding, scale the stockades, capture its forts, batter down a wall or two, and sail off like a pirate with ship-loads of booty for Quebec. What did the ancient company care? European treaties restored its forts, and the honourable adventurers presented a bill of damages to their government for lost furs.

But came a sudden change. Great movements westward began simultaneously in all parts of the east.

This resulted from two events—England's victory over France at Quebec, and the American colonies' Declaration of Independence. The downfall of French ascendancy in America meant an end to that license system which limited the fur trade to favourites of the governor. That threw an army of some two thousand men—*voyageurs, courreurs des bois, mangeurs*

* 1685-'87; the same Le Moyne d'Iberville who died in Havana after spending his strength trying to colonize the Mississippi for France—one instance which shows how completely the influence of the fur trade connected every part of America, from the Gulf to the pole, as in a network irrespective of flag.

*de lard,** famous hunters, traders, and trappers—on their own resources. The MacDonalds and MacKenzies and MacGillivrays and Frobishers and MacTavishes—Scotch merchants of Quebec and Montreal—were quick to seize the opportunity. Uniting under the names of North-West Fur Company and X. Y. Fur Company, they re-engaged the entire retinue of cast-off Frenchmen, woodcraftsmen who knew every path and stream from Labrador to the Rocky Mountains. Giving higher pay and better fare than the old French traders, the Scotch merchants prepared to hold the field against all comers in the Canadas. And when the X. Y. amalgamated with the larger company before the opening of the nineteenth century, the Nor' Westers became as famous for their daring success as their unscrupulous ubiquity.

But at that stage came the other factor—American Independence. Locked in conflict with England, what deadlier blow to British power could France deal than to turn over Louisiana with its million square miles and ninety thousand inhabitants to the American Republic? The Lewis and Clark exploration up the Missouri, over the mountains, and down the Columbia to the Pacific was a natural sequel to the Louisiana Purchase, and proved that the United States had gained a world of wealth for its fifteen million dollars. Before Lewis and Clark's feat, vague rumours had come to the New England colonies of the riches to be had in the west. The Russian Government had organized a strong company to trade for furs with the natives of the Pacific coast. Captain Vancouver's report of the

* The men employed in mere rafting and barge work in contradistinction to the trappers and *voyageurs*.

north-west coast was corroborated by Captain Grey, who had stumbled into the mouth of the Columbia; and before 1800 nearly thirty Boston vessels yearly sailed to the Northern Pacific for the fur trade.

Eager to forestall the Hudson's Bay Company, now beginning to rub its eyes and send explorers westward to bring Indians down to the bay,* Alexander MacKenzie of the Nor' Westers pushed down the great river named after him,† and forced his way across the northern Rockies to the Pacific. Flotillas of North-West canoes quickly followed MacKenzie's lead north to the arctics, south-west down the Columbia. At Michilimackinac—one of the most lawless and roaring of the fur posts—was an association known as the Mackinaw Company, made up of old French hunters under English management, trading westward from the Lakes to the Mississippi. Hudson Bay, Nor' Wester, and Mackinaw were daily pressing closer and closer to that vast unoccupied Eldorado—the fur country between the Missouri and the Saskatchewan, bounded eastward by the Mississippi, west by the Pacific.

Possession is nine points out of ten. The question was who would get possession first.

Unfortunately that question presented itself to three alert rivals at the same time and in the same light. And the war began.

* This was probably the real motive of the Hudson's Bay Company sending Hearne to explore the Coppermine in 1769-'71. Hearne, unfortunately, has never reaped the glory for this, owing to his too-ready surrender of Prince of Wales Fort to the French in La Perouse's campaign of 1782.

† To the mouth of the MacKenzie River in 1789, across the Rockies in 1793, for which feats he was knighted.

The Mackinaw traders had all they could handle from the Lakes to the Mississippi. Therefore they did little but try to keep other traders out of the western preserve. The Hudson's Bay remained in its somnolent state till the very extremity of outrage brought such a mighty awakening that it put its rivals to an eternal sleep. But the Nor' Westers were not asleep. And John Jacob Astor of New York, who had accumulated what was a gigantic fortune in those days as a purchaser of furs from America and a seller to Europe, was not asleep. And Manual Lisa, a Spaniard, of New Orleans, engaged at St. Louis in fur trade with the Osage tribes, was not asleep.

CHAPTER II

THREE COMPANIES IN CONFLICT

If only one company had attempted to take possession of the vast fur country west of the Mississippi, the fur trade would not have become international history; but three companies were at strife for possession of territory richer than Spanish Eldorado, albeit the coin was "beaver"—not gold. Each of three companies was determined to use all means fair or foul to exclude its rivals from the field; and a fourth company was drawn into the strife because the conflict menaced its own existence.

From their Canadian headquarters at Fort William on Lake Superior, the Nor' Westers had yearly moved farther down the Columbia towards the mouth, where Lewis and Clark had wintered on the Pacific. In New York, Mr. Astor was formulating schemes to add to his fur empire the territory west of the Mississippi. At St. Louis was Manuel Lisa, the Spanish fur trader, already reaching out for the furs of the Missouri. And leagues to the north on the remote waters of Hudson Bay, the old English company lazily blinked its eyes open to the fact that competition was telling heavily on its returns, and that it would be compelled to take a hand in the merry game of a fur traders' war, though the real awakening had not yet come.

Lisa was the first to act on the information brought back by Lewis and Clark. Forming a partnership with Morrison and Menard of Kaskaskia, Ill., and engaging Drouillard, one of Lewis and Clark's men, as interpreter, he left St. Louis with a heavily laden keel-boat in the spring of 1807. Against the turbulent current of the Missouri in the full flood-tide of spring this unwieldy craft was slowly hauled or "cordelled," twenty men along the shore pulling the clumsy barge by means of a line fastened high enough on the mast to be above brushwood. Where the water was shallow the *voyageurs* poled single file, facing the stern and pushing with full chest strength. In deeper current oars were used.

Launched for the wilderness, with no certain knowledge but that the wilderness was peopled by hostiles, poor Bissonette deserted when they were only at the Osage River. Lisa issued orders for Drouillard to bring the deserter back dead or alive—orders that were filled to the letter, for the poor fellow was brought back shot, to die at St. Charles. Passing the mouth of the Platte, the company descried a solitary white man drifting down-stream in a dugout. When it was discovered that this lone trapper was John Colter, who had left Lewis and Clark on their return trip and remained to hunt on the Upper Missouri, one can imagine the shouts that welcomed him. Having now been in the upper country for three years, he was the one man fitted to guide Lisa's party, and was promptly persuaded to turn back with the treasure-seekers.

Past Blackbird's grave, where the great chief of the Omahas had been buried astride his war-horse high on the crest of a hill that his spirit might see the canoes

of the French *voyageurs* going up and down the river; past the lonely grave of Floyd,* whose death, like that of many a New World hero marked another milestone in the westward progress of empire; past the Aricaras, with their three hundred warriors gorgeous in vermillion, firing volleys across the keel-boat with fusees got from rival traders; † past the Mandans, threatening death to the intruders; past five thousand Assiniboine hostiles massed on the bank with weapons ready; up the Yellowstone to the mouth of the Bighorn—went Lisa, stopping in the very heart of the Crow tribe, those thieves and pirates and marauders of the western wilderness. Stockades were hastily stuck in the ground, banked up with a miniature parapet, flanked with the two usual bastions that could send a raking fire along all four walls; and Lisa was ready for trade.

In 1808 the keel-boat returned to St. Louis, loaded to the water-line with furs. The Missouri Company was formally organized, ‡ and yearly expeditions were sent not only to the Bighorn, but to the Three Forks of the Missouri, among the ferocious Blackfeet. Of the two hundred and fifty men employed, fifty were trained riflemen for the defence of the trappers; but this did not prevent more than thirty men losing their lives at the hands of the Blackfeet within two years. Among the victims was Drouillard, struck down wheel-

* Of the Lewis and Clark expedition.

† Either the Nor' Westers or the Mackinaws, for the H. B. C. were not yet so far south.

‡ In it were the two original partners, Clark, the Chouteaus of Missouri fame, Andrew Henry, the first trader to cross the northern continental divide, and others of whom Chittenden gives full particulars.

ing his horse round and round as a shield, literally torn to pieces by the exasperated savages and eaten according to the hideous superstition that the flesh of a brave man imparts bravery. All the plundered clothing, ammunition, and peltries were carried to the Nor' Westers' trading posts north of the boundary.* Not if the West were to be baptized in blood would the traders retreat. Crippled, but not beaten, the Missouri men under Andrew Henry's leadership moved south-west over the mountains into the region that was to become famous as Pierre's Hole.

Meanwhile neither the Nor' Westers nor Mr. Astor remained idle. The same year that Lisa organized his Missouri Fur Company Mr. Astor obtained a charter from the State of New York for the American Fur Company. To lessen competition in the great scheme gradually framing itself in his mind, he bought out that half of the Mackinaw Company's trade † which was within the United States, the posts in the British dominions falling into the hands of the all-powerful Nor' Westers. Intimate with the leading partners of the Nor' Westers, Mr. Astor proposed to avoid rivalry on the Pacific coast by giving the Canadians a third interest in his plans for the capture of the Pacific trade.

Lords of their own field, the Nor' Westers rejected Mr. Astor's proposal with a scorn born of unshaken

* This on the testimony of a North-West partner, Alexander Henry, a copy of whose diary is in the Parliamentary Library, Ottawa. Both Coues and Chittenden, the American historians, note the corroborative testimony of Henry's journal.

† Henceforth known as the South-West Company, in distinction to the North-West.

confidence, and at once prepared to anticipate American possession of the Pacific coast. Mr. Astor countered by engaging the best of the dissatisfied Nor' Westers for his Pacific Fur Company. Duncan MacDougall, a little pepper-box of a Scotchman, with a bumptious idea of authority which was always making other eyes smart, was to be Mr. Astor's proxy on the ship to round the Horn and at the headquarters of the company on the Pacific. Donald MacKenzie was a relative of Sir Alexander of the Nor' Westers, and must have left the northern traders from some momentary pique; for he soon went back to the Canadian companies, became chief factor at Fort Garry,* the headquarters of the Hudson's Bay Company, and was for a time governor of Red River. Alexander MacKay had accompanied Sir Alexander MacKenzie on his famous northern trips, and was one Nor' Wester who served Mr. Astor with fidelity to the death. The elder Stuart was a rollicking winterer from The Labrador, with the hail-fellow-well-met-air of an equal among the mercurial French-Canadians. The younger Stuart was of the game, independent spirit that made Nor' Westers famous.

Of the Tonquin's voyage round the Horn—with its crew of twenty, and choleric Captain Thorn, and four † partners headed by the fussy little MacDougall in mutiny against the captain's discipline, and twelve clerks always getting their landlubber clumsiness in the sailors' way, and thirteen *voyageurs* ever grumbling at the ocean swell that gave them qualms unknown on inland

* The modern Winnipeg.

† MacKay, MacDougall, and the two Stuarts

waters—little need be said. Washington Irving has told this story; and what Washington Irving leaves untold, Captain Chittenden has recently unearthed from the files of the Missouri archives.

The Tonquin sailed from New York, September 6, 1810. The captain had been a naval officer, and cursed the partners for their easy familiarity with the men before the mast, and the note-writing clerks for a lot of scribbling blockheads, and the sea-sick *voyageurs* for a set of fresh-water braggarts. And the captain's amiable feelings were reciprocated by every Nor' Wester on board.

Cape Horn was doubled on Christmas Day, Hawaii sighted in February, some thirty Sandwich Islanders engaged for service in the new company, and the Columbia entered at the end of March, 1811. Eight lives were lost attempting to run small boats against the turbulent swell of tide and current. The place to land, the site to build, details of the new fort, Astoria—all were subjects for the jangling that went on between the fuming little Scotchman MacDougall and Captain Thorn, till the Tonquin weighed anchor on the 1st of June and sailed away to trade on the north coast, accompanied by only one partner, Alexander MacKay, and one clerk, James Lewis.

The obstinacy that had dominated Captain Thorn continued to dictate a wrong-headed course. In spite of Mr. Astor's injunction to keep Indians off the ship and MacKay's warning that the Nootka tribes were treacherous, the captain allowed natives to swarm over his decks. Once, when MacKay was on shore, Thorn lost his temper, struck an impudent chief in the face with a bundle of furs, and expelled the Indian from the

ship. When MacKay came back and learned what had happened, he warned the captain of Indian vengeance and urged him to leave the harbour. These warnings the captain scorned, welcoming back the Indians, and no doubt exulting to see that they had become almost servile.

One morning, when Thorn and MacKay were yet asleep, a pirogue with twenty Indians approached the ship. The Indians were unarmed, and held up furs to trade. They were welcomed on deck. Another canoe glided near and another band mounted the ship's ladder. Soon the vessel was completely surrounded with canoes, the braves coming aboard with furs, the squaws laughing and chatting and rocking their crafts at the ship's side. This day the Indians were neither pertinacious nor impertinent in their trade. Matters went swimmingly till some of the Tonquin's crew noticed with alarm that all the Indians were taking knives and other weapons in exchange for their furs and that groups were casually stationing themselves at positions of wonderful advantage on the deck. MacKay and Thorn were quickly called.

This is probably what the Indians were awaiting.

MacKay grasped the fearful danger of the situation and again warned the captain. Again Thorn slighted the warning. But anchors were hoisted. The Indians thronged closer, as if in the confusion of hasty trade. Then the dour-headed Thorn understood. With a shout he ordered the decks cleared. His shout was answered by a counter-shout—the wild, shrill shriekings of the Indian war-cry! All the newly-bought weapons flashed in the morning sun. Lewis, the clerk, fell first, bending over a pile of goods, and rolled down the com-

panion-way with a mortal stab in his back. MacKay was knocked from his seat on the taffrail by a war-club and pitched overboard to the canoes, where the squaws received him on their knives. Thorn had been roused so suddenly that he had no weapon but his pocket-knife. With this he was trying to fight his way to the fire-arms of the cabin, when he was driven, faint from loss of blood, to the wheel-house. A tomahawk clubbed down, and he, too, was pitched overboard to the knives of the squaws.

While the officers were falling on the quarter-deck, sailors and Sandwich Islanders were fighting to the death elsewhere. The seven men who had been sent up the ratlins to rig sails came shinning down ropes and masts to gain the cabin. Two were instantly killed. A third fell down the main hatch fatally wounded; and the other four got into the cabin, where they broke holes and let fly with musket and rifle. This sent the savages scattering overboard to the waiting canoes. The survivors then fired charge after charge from the deck cannon, which drove the Indians to land with tremendous loss of life.

All day the Indians watched the Tonquin's sails flapping to the wind; but none of the ship's crew appeared on the deck. The next morning the Tonquin still lay rocking to the tide; but no white men emerged from below. Eager to plunder the apparently deserted ship, the Indians launched their canoes and cautiously paddled near. A white man—one of those who had fallen down the hatch wounded—staggered up to the deck, waved for the natives to come on board, and dropped below. Gluttonous of booty, the savages beset the sides of the Tonquin like flocks of carrion-birds.

Barely were they on deck when sea and air were rent with a terrific explosion as of ten thousand cannon! The ship was blown to atoms, bodies torn asunder, and the sea scattered with bloody remnants of what had been living men but a moment before.

The mortally wounded man, thought to be Lewis, the clerk,* had determined to effect the death of his enemies on his own pyre. Unable to escape with the other four refugees under cover of night, he had put a match to four tons of powder in the hold. But the refugees might better have perished with the Tonquin; for head-winds drove them ashore, where they were captured and tortured to death with all the prolonged cruelty that savages practise. Between twenty and thirty lives were lost in this disaster to the Pacific Fur Company; and MacDougall was left at Astoria with but a handful of men and a weakly-built fort to wait the coming of the overland traders whom Mr. Astor was sending by way of the Missouri and Columbia.

* Franchère, one of the scribbling clerks whom Thorn so detested, says this man was Weekes, who almost lost his life entering the Columbia. Irving, who drew much of his material from Franchère, says Lewis, and may have had special information from Mr. Astor; but all accounts—Franchère's, and Ross Cox's, and Alexander Ross's—are from the same source, the Indian interpreter, who, in the confusion of the massacre, sprang overboard into the canoes of the squaws, who spared him on account of his race. Franchère became prominent in Montreal, Cox in British Columbia, and Ross in Red River Settlement of Winnipeg, where the story of the fur company conflict became folk-lore to the old settlers. There is scarcely a family but has some ancestor who took part in the contest among the fur companies at the opening of the nineteenth century, and the tale is part of the settlement's traditions.

Indian runners brought vague rumours of thirty white men building a fort on the Upper Columbia. If these had been the overland party, they would have come on to Astoria. Who they were, MacDougall, who had himself been a Nor' Wester, could easily guess. As a countercheck, Stuart of Labrador was preparing to go up-stream and build a fur post for the Pacific Company; but Astoria was suddenly electrified by the apparition of nine white men in a canoe flying a British flag.

The North-West Company arrived just three months too late!

David Thompson, the partner at the head of the newcomers, had been delayed in the mountains by the desertion of his guides. Much to the disgust of Labrador Stuart, who might change masters often but was loyal to only one master at a time, MacDougall and Thompson hailed each other as old friends. Every respect is due Mr. Thompson as an explorer, but to the Astorians living under the ruthless code of fur-trading rivalry, he should have been nothing more than a North-West spy, to be guardedly received in a Pacific Company fort. As a matter of fact, he was welcomed with open arms, saw everything, and set out again with a supply of Astoria provisions.

History is not permitted to jump at conclusions, but unanswered questions will always cling round Thompson's visit. Did he bear some message from the Nor' Westers to MacDougall? Why was Stuart, an honourable, fair-minded man, in such high dudgeon that he shook free of Thompson's company on their way back up the Columbia? Why did MacDougall lose his tone of courage with such surprising swiftness?

How could the next party of Nor' Westers take him back into the fold and grant him a partnership *ostensibly* without the knowledge of the North-West annual council, held in Fort William on Lake Superior?

Early in August wandering tribes brought news of the Tonquin's destruction, and Astoria bestirred itself to strengthen pickets, erect bastions, mount four-pounders, and drill for war. MacDougall's North-West training now came out, and he entered on a policy of conciliation with the Indians that culminated in his marrying Comcomly's daughter. He also perpetrated the world-famous threat of letting small-pox out of a bottle exhibited to the chiefs unless they maintained good behaviour. Traders established inland posts, the schooner Dolly was built, and New Year's Day of 1812 ushered in with a firing of cannon and festive allowance of rum. On January 18th arrived the forerunners of the overland party, ragged, wasted, starving, with a tale of blundering and mismanagement that must have been gall to MacKenzie, the old Nor' Wester accompanying them. The main body under Hunt reached Astoria in February, and two other detachments later.

The management of the overlanders had been intrusted to Wilson Price Hunt of New Jersey, who at once proceeded to Montreal with Donald MacKenzie, the Nor' Wester. Here the fine hand of the North-West Company was first felt. Rum, threats, promises, and sudden orders whisking them away prevented capable *voyageurs* from enlisting under the Pacific Company. Only worthless fellows could be engaged, which explains in part why these empty braggarts so often failed Mr. Hunt. Pushing up the Ottawa in

a birch canoe, Hunt and MacKenzie crossed the lake to Michilimackinac.

Here the hand of the North-West Company was again felt. Tattlers went from man to man telling yarns of terror to frighten *engagés* back. Did a man enlist? Sudden debts were remembered or manufactured, and the bill presented to Hunt. Was a *voyageur* on the point of embarking? A swarm of naked brats with a frouzy Indian wife set up a howl of woe. Hunt finally got off with thirty men, accompanied by Mr. Ramsay Crooks, a distinguished Nor' Wester, who afterward became famous as the president of the American Fur Company. Going south by way of Green Bay and the Mississippi, Hunt reached St. Louis, where the machinations of another rival were put to work.

Having rejected Mr. Astor's suggestion to take part in the Pacific Company, Mr. Manuel Lisa of the Missouri traders did not propose to see his field invaded. The same difficulties were encountered at St. Louis in engaging men as at Montreal, and when Hunt was finally ready in March, 1811, to set out with his sixty men up the Missouri, Lisa resurrected a liquor debt against Pierre Dorion, Hunt's interpreter, with the fluid that cheers a French-Canadian charged at ten dollars a quart. Pierre slipped Lisa's coil by going overland through the woods and meeting Hunt's party farther up-stream, beyond the law.

Whatever his motive, Lisa at once organized a search party of twenty picked *voyageurs* to go up the Missouri to the rescue of that Andrew Henry who had fled from the Blackfeet over the mountains to Snake River. Traders too often secured safe passage through hostile territory in those lawless days by giving the

savages muskets enough to blow out the brains of the next comers. Lisa himself was charged with this by Crooks and MacLellan.* Perhaps that was his reason for pushing ahead at all speed to overtake Hunt before either party had reached Sioux territory.

Hunt got wind of the pursuit. The faster Lisa came, the harder Hunt fled. This curious race lasted for a thousand miles and ended in Lisa coming up with the Astorians on June 2d. For a second time the Spaniard tampered with Dorion. Had not two English travellers intervened, Hunt and Lisa would have settled their quarrel with pistols for two. Thereafter the rival parties proceeded in friendly fashion, Lisa helping to gather horses for Hunt's party to cross the mountains.

That overland journey was one of the most pitiful, fatuous, mismanaged expeditions in the fur trade. Why a party of sixty-four well-armed, well-provisioned men failed in doing what any two *voyageurs* or trappers were doing every day, can only be explained by comparison to a bronco in a blizzard. Give the half-wild prairie creature the bit, and it will carry its rider through any storm. Jerk it to right, to left, east, and west till it loses its confidence, and the bronco is as helpless as the rider. So with the *voyageur*. Crossing the mountains alone in his own way, he could evade famine and danger and attack by lifting a brother trader's cache—hidden provisions—or tarrying in Indian lodges till game crossed his path, or marrying the daughter of a hostile chief, or creeping so quietly

* A partner in trade with Crooks, both of whom lost everything going up the Missouri in Lisa's wake.

through the woods neither game nor Indian scout could detect his presence. With a noisy cavalcade of sixty-four all this was impossible. Broken into detachments, weak, emaciated, stripped naked, on the verge of dementia and cannibalism, now shouting to each other across a roaring cañon, now sinking in despair before a blind wall, the overlanders finally reached Astoria after nearly a year's wanderings.

Mr. Astor's second ship, the Beaver, arrived with re-enforcements of men and provisions. More posts were established inland. After several futile attempts, despatches were sent overland to St. Louis. Under direction of Mr. Hunt, the Beaver sailed for Alaska to trade with the Russians. Word came from the North-West forts on the Upper Columbia of war with England. Mr. Astor's third ship, the Lark, was wrecked. Astoria was now altogether in the hands of men who had been Nor' Westers.

And what was the alert North-West Company doing? *

* Doings in the North-West camp have only become known of late from the daily journals of two North-West partners—MacDonald of Garth, whose papers were made public by a descendant of the MacKenzies, and Alexander Henry, whose account is in the Ottawa Library.

CHAPTER III

THE NOR' WESTERS' COUP

"It had been decided in council at Fort William that the company should send the Isaac Todd to the Columbia River, where the Americans had established Astoria, and that a party should proceed from Fort William (overland) to meet the ship on the coast," wrote MacDonald of Garth, a North-West partner, for the perusal of his children.

This was decided at the North-West council of 1812, held annually on the shores of Lake Superior. It was just a year from the time that Thompson had discovered the American fort in the hands of former Nor' Westers. At this meeting Thompson's report must have been read.

The overland party was to be led by the two partners, John George MacTavish and Alexander Henry, the sea expedition on the Isaac Todd by Donald MacTavish, who had actually been appointed governor of the American fort in anticipation of victory. On the Isaac Todd also went MacDonald of Garth.*

The overland expedition was to thread that labyrinth of water-ways connecting Lake Superior and the

* A son of the English officer of the Eighty-fourth Regiment in the American War of Independence.

Saskatchewan, thence across the plains to Athabasca, over the northern Rockies, past Jasper House, through Yellow Head Pass, and down half the length of the Columbia through Kootenay plains to Astoria. One has only to recall the roaring cañons of the northern Rockies, with their sheer cataracts and bottomless precipices, to realize how much more hazardous this route was than that followed by Hunt from St. Louis to Astoria. Hunt had to cross only the plains and the width of the Rockies. The Nor' Westers not only did this, but passed down the middle of the Rockies for nearly a thousand miles.

Before doubling the Horn the Isaac Todd was to sail from Quebec to England for convoy of a war-ship. The Nor' Westers naïve assurance of victory was only exceeded by their utter indifference to danger, difficulty, and distance in the attainment of an end. In view of the terror which the Isaac Todd was alleged to have inspired in MacDougall's mind, it is interesting to know what the Nor' Westers thought of their ship. "*A twenty-gun letter of marque with a mongrel crew,*" writes MacDonald of Garth, "*a miserable sailor with a miserable commander and a rascally crew.*" On the way out MacDonald transferred to the British convoy Raccoon, leaving the frisky old Governor MacTavish with his gay barmaid Jane* drinking pottle deep on the Isaac Todd, where the rightly disgusted captain was not on speaking terms with his Excellency. "*We were nearly six weeks before we could double Cape Horn, and were driven half-way to the Cape of Good*

* Jane Barnes, an adventuress from Portsmouth, the first white woman on the Columbia.

Hope; . . . at last doubled the cape under topsails, . . . the deck one sheet of ice for six weeks, . . . our sails one frozen sheet; . . . lost sight of the Isaac Todd in a gale," wrote MacDonald on the Raccoon.

It will be remembered that Hunt's overlanders arrived at Astoria months after the Pacific Company's ship. Such swift coasters of the wilderness were the Nor' Westers, this overland party came sweeping down the Columbia, ten canoes strong, hale, hearty, singing as they paddled, a month before the Raccoon had come, six months before their own ship, the Isaac Todd.

And what did MacDougall do? Threw open his gates in welcome, let an army of eighty rivals camp under shelter of his fort guns, demeaned himself into a pusillanimous, little, running fetch-and-carry at the beck of the Nor' Westers, instead of keeping sternly inside his fort, starving rivals into surrender, or training his cannon upon them if they did not decamp.

Alexander Henry, the partner at the head of these dauntless Nor' Westers, says their provisions were "nearly all gone." But, oh! the bragging *voyageurs* told those quaking Astorians terrible things of what the Isaac Todd would do. There were to be British convoys and captures and prize-money and prisoners of war carried off to Sainte Anne alone knew where. The American-born scorned these exaggerated yarns, knowing their purpose, but not so MacDougall. All his pot-valiant courage sank at the thought of the Isaac Todd, and when the campers ran up a British flag he forbade the display of American colours above Astoria. The end of it was that he sold out Mr. Astor's interests at forty cents on the dollar, probably salving his con-

science with the excuse that he had saved that percentage of property from capture by the Raccoon.

At the end of November a large ship was sighted standing in over the bar with all sails spread but no ensign out. Three shots were fired from Astoria. There was no answer. What if this were the long-lost Mr. Hunt coming back from Alaskan trade on the Beaver? The doughty Nor' Westers hastily packed their furs, ninety-two bales in all, and sent their *voyageurs* scampering up-stream to hide and await a signal. But MacDougall was equal to the emergency. He launched out for the ship, prepared to be an American if it were the Beaver with Mr. Hunt, a Nor' Wester if it were the Raccoon with a company partner.

It was the Raccoon, and the British captain addressed the Astorians in words that have become historic: "*Is this the fort I've heard so much about? D—— me, I could batter it down in two hours with a four-pounder!*"

Two weeks later the Union Jack was hoisted above Astoria, with traders and marines drawn up under arms to fire a volley. A bottle of Madeira was broken against the flagstaff, the country pronounced a British possession by the captain, cheers given, and eleven guns fired from the bastions.

At this stage all accounts, particularly American accounts, have rung down the curtain on the catastrophe, leaving the Nor' Westers intoxicated with success. But another act was to complete the disasters of Astoria, for the very excess of intoxication brought swift judgment on the revelling Nor' Westers.

The Raccoon left on the last day of 1813. MacDougall had been appointed partner in the North-West

Company, and the other Canadians re-engaged under their own flag. When Hunt at last arrived in the *Pedler*, which he had chartered after the wreck of Mr. Astor's third vessel, the *Lark*, it was too late to do more than carry away those Americans still loyal to Mr. Astor. Farnham was left at Kamtchatka, whence he made his way to Europe. The others were captured off California and they afterward scattered to all parts of the world. Early in April, 1814, a brigade of Nor' Westers, led by MacDonald of Garth and the younger MacTavish, set out for the long journey across the mountains and prairie to the company's headquarters at Fort William. In the flotilla of ten canoes went many of the old Astorians. Two weeks afterward came the belated Isaac Todd with the Nor' Westers' white flag at its foretop and the dissolute old Governor MacTavish holding a high carnival of riot in the cabin.

No darker picture exists than that of Astoria—or Fort George, as the British called it—under Governor MacTavish's *régime*. The picture is from the hand of a North-West partner himself. "*Not in bed till 2 A. M.; . . . the gentlemen and the crew all drunk; . . . famous fellows for grog they are; . . . diced for articles belonging to Mr. M.*," Alexander Henry had written when the *Raccoon* was in port; and now under Governor MacTavish's vicious example every pretence to decency was discarded.

"*Avec les loups il faut hurler*" was a common saying among Nor' Westers, and perhaps that very assimilation to the native races which contributed so much to success also contributed to the trader's undoing. White men and Indians vied with each other in mutual debasement. Chinook and Saxon and Frenchmen alike

lay on the sand sodden with corruption; and if one died from carousals, companions weighted neck and feet with stones and pushed the corpse into the river. Quarrels broke out between the wassailing governor and the other partners. Emboldened, the underlings and hangers-on indulged in all sorts of theft. "All the gentlemen were intoxicated," writes one who was present; *seven hours rowing one mile*, innocently states the record of another day, *the tide running seven feet high past the fort.*

The spring rains had ceased. Mountain peaks emerged from the empurpled horizon in domes of opal above the clouds, and the Columbia was running its annual mill-race of spring floods, waters milky from the silt of countless glaciers and turbulent from the rush of a thousand cataracts. Governor MacTavish * and Alexander Henry had embarked with six *voyageurs* to cross the river. A blustering wind caught the sail. A tidal wave pitched amidships. The craft filled and sank within sight of the fort.

So perished the conquerors of Astoria!

* In justice to the many descendants of the numerous clan MacTavish in the service of the fur companies, this MacTavish should be distinguished from others of blameless lives.

CHAPTER IV

THE ANCIENT HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY WAKENS UP

THOSE eighty † Astorians and Nor' Westers who set inland with their ten canoes and boats under protection of two swivels encountered as many dangers on the long trip across the continent as they had left at Fort George.

Following the wandering course of the Columbia, the traders soon passed the international boundary northward into the Arrow Lakes with their towering sky-line of rampart walls, on to the great bend of the Columbia where the river becomes a tumultuous torrent milky with glacial sediment, now raving through a narrow cañon, now teased into a white whirlpool by obstructing rocks, now tumbling through vast shadowy forests, now foaming round the green icy masses of some great glacier, and always mountain-girt by the tent-like peaks of the eternal snows.

“A plain, unvarnished tale, my dear Bellefeuille,” wrote the mighty MacDonald of Garth in his eighty-sixth year for a son; but the old trader's tale needed no varnish of rhetoric. *“Nearing the mountains we got scarce of provisions; . . . bought horses for beef. . . . Here (at the Great Bend) we left canoes and be-*

* Some say seventy-four.

gan a mountain pass (Yellow Head Pass). . . . The river meanders much, . . . and we cut across, . . . holding by one another's hands, . . . wading to the hips in water, dashing in, frozen at one point, thawed at the next, . . . frozen before we dashed in, . . . our men carrying blankets and provisions on their heads; . . . four days' hard work before we got to Jasper House at the source of the Athabasca, sometimes camping on snow twenty feet deep, so that the fires we made in the evening were fifteen or twenty feet below us in the morning."

They had now crossed the mountains, and taking to canoes again paddled down-stream to the *portage* between Athabasca River and the Saskatchewan. Tramping sixty miles, they reached Fort Augustus (Edmonton) on the Saskatchewan, where canoes were made on the spot, and the *voyageurs* launched down-stream a trifling distance of two thousand miles by the windings of the river, past Lake Winnipeg southward to Fort William, the Nor' Westers' headquarters on Lake Superior.

Here the capture of Astoria was reported, and bales to the value of a million dollars in modern money sent east in fifty canoes with an armed guard of three hundred men.* Coasting along the north shore of Lake Superior, the *voyageurs* came to the Sault and found Mr. Johnston's establishment a scene of smoking ruins. It was necessary to use the greatest caution not to attract the notice of warring parties on the Lakes.

* The enormous returns made up largely of the Astoria capture. The unusually large guard was no doubt owing to the War of 1812.

"Overhauled a canoe going eastward, . . . a Mackinaw trader and four Indians with a dozen fresh American scalps," writes MacDonald, showing to what a pass things had come. Two days later a couple of boats were overtaken and compelled to halt by a shot from MacDonald's swivels. The strangers proved to be the escaping crew of a British ship which had been captured by two American schooners, and the British officer bore bad news. The American schooners were now on the lookout for the rich prize of furs being taken east in the North-West canoes. Slipping under the nose of these schooners in the dark, the officer hurried to Mackinac, leaving the Nor' Westers hidden in the mouth of French River. William MacKay, a Nor' West partner, at once sallied out to the defence of the furs.

Determined to catch the brigade, one schooner was hovering about the Sault, the other cruising into the countless recesses of the north shore. Against the latter the Mackinaw traders directed their forces, boarding her, and, as MacDonald tells with brutal frankness, "*pinning the crew with fixed bayonets to the deck.*" Lying snugly at anchor, the victors awaited the coming of the other unsuspecting schooner, let her cast anchor, bore down upon her, poured in a broadside, and took both schooners to Mackinac. Freed from all apprehension of capture, the North-West brigade proceeded eastward to the Ottawa River, and without further adventure came to Montreal, where all was wild confusion from another cause.

At the very time when war endangered the entire route of the Nor' Westers from Montreal to the Pacific, the Hudson's Bay Company awakened from its long



Indian *voyageurs* "packing" over long *portage*, each packet containing from fifty to one hundred pounds.



sleep. While Mr. Astor was pushing his schemes in the United States, Lord Selkirk was formulating plans for the control of all Canada's fur trade. Like Mr. Astor, he too had been the guest at the North-West banquets in the Beaver Club, Montreal, and had heard fabulous things from those magnates of the north about wealth made in the fur trade. Returning to England, Lord Selkirk bought up enough stock of the Hudson's Bay Company to give him full control, and secured from the shareholders an enormous grant of land surrounding the mouths of the Red and Assiniboine rivers.

Where the Assiniboine joins the northern Red were situated Fort Douglas (later Fort Garry, now Winnipeg), the headquarters of the Hudson's Bay Company, and Fort Gibraltar, the North-West post whence supplies were sent all the way from the Mandans on the Missouri to the Eskimo in the arctics.

Not satisfied with this *coup*, Lord Selkirk engaged Colin Robertson, an old Nor' Wester, to gather a brigade of *voyageurs* two hundred strong at Montreal and proceed up the Nor' Westers' route to Athabasca, MacKenzie River, and the Rockies. This was the noisy, blustering, bragging company of gaily-bedizened fellows that had turned the streets of Montreal into a roistering booth when the Astorians came to the end of their long eastward journey. Poor, fool-happy revellers! Eighteen of them died of starvation in the far, cold north, owing to the conflict between Fort Douglas and Gibraltar, which delayed supplies.

Beginning in 1811, Lord Selkirk poured a stream of colonists to his newly-acquired territory by way of Churchill and York Factory on Hudson Bay. These

people were given lands, and in return expected to defend the Hudson's Bay Company from Nor' Westers. The Nor' Westers struck back by discouraging the colonists, shipping them free out of the country, and getting possession of their arms.

Miles MacDonell, formerly of the King's Royal Regiment, New York, governor of the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Douglas, at once issued proclamations forbidding Indians to trade furs with Nor' Westers and ordering Nor' Westers from the country. On the strength of these proclamations two or three outlying North-West forts were destroyed and North-West fur brigades rifled. Duncan Cameron,* the North-West partner at Fort Gibraltar, countered by letting his *Bois-Brûlés*, a ragged half-breed army of wild plain rangers under Cuthbert Grant, canter across the two miles that separated the rival forts, and pour a volley of musketry into the Hudson Bay houses. To save the post for the Hudson's Bay Company, Miles MacDonell gave himself up and was shipped out of the country.

But the Hudson's Bay fort was only biding its time till the valiant North-West defenders had scattered to their winter posts. Then an armed party seized Duncan Cameron not far from the North-West fort, and with pistol cocked by one man, publicly horsewhipped the Nor' Wester. Afterward, when Semple, the new Hudson's Bay governor, was absent from Fort Douglas and could not therefore be held responsible for consequences, the Hudson's Bay men, led by the same Colin Robertson

* An antecedent of the late Sir Roderick Cameron of New York.

who had brought the large brigade from Montreal, marched across the prairie to Fort Gibraltar, captured Mr. Cameron, plundered all the Nor' Westers' stores, and burned the fort to the ground. By way of retaliation for MacDonell's expulsion, the North-West partner was shipped down to Hudson Bay, where he might as well have been on Devil's Island for all the chance of escape.

One company at fault as often as the other, similar outrages were perpetrated in all parts of the north fur country, the blood of rival traders being spilt without a qualm of conscience or thought of results. The effect of this conflict among white men on the blood-thirsty red-skins one may guess. The *Bois-Brûlés* were clamouring for Cuthbert Grant's permission to wipe the English—meaning the Hudson's Bay men—off the earth; and the Swampy Crees and Saulteaux under Chief Peguis were urging Governor Semple to let them defend the Hudson's Bay—meaning kill the Nor' Westers.

The crisis followed sharp on the destruction of Fort Gibraltar. That post had sent all supplies to North-West forts. If Fort Douglas of the Hudson's Bay Company, past which North-West canoes must paddle to turn westward to the plains, should intercept the incoming brigade of Nor' Westers' supplies, what would become of the two thousand North-West traders and *voyageurs* and *engagés* inland? Whether the Hudson's Bay had such intentions or not, the Nor' Westers were determined to prevent the possibility.

Like the red cross that called ancient clans to arms, scouts went scouring across the plains to rally the *Bois-Brûlés* from Portage la Prairie and Souris and Qu'Ap-

pelle.* Led by Cuthbert Grant, they skirted north of the Hudson's Bay post to meet and disembark supplies above Fort Douglas. It was but natural for the settlers to mistake this armed cavalcade, red with paint and chanting war-songs, for hostiles.

Rushing to Fort Douglas, the settlers gave the alarm. Ordering a field-piece to follow, Governor Semple marched out with a little army of twenty-eight Hudson's Bay men. The Nor' Westers thought that he meant to obstruct their way till his other forces had captured their coming canoes. The Hudson's Bay thought that Cuthbert Grant meant to attack the Selkirk settlers.

It was in the evening of June 19, 1816. The two parties met at the edge of a swamp beside a cluster of trees, since called Seven Oaks. Nor' Westers say that Governor Semple caught the bridle of their scout and tried to throw him from his horse. The Hudson's Bay say that the governor had no sooner got within range than the half-breed scout leaped down and fired from the shelter of his horse, breaking Semple's thigh.

It is well known how the first blood of battle has the same effect on all men of whatever race. The human is eclipsed by that brute savagery which comes down from ages when man was a creature of prey. In a trice twenty-one of the Hudson's Bay men lay dead. While Grant had turned to obtain carriers to bear the wounded governor off the field, poor Semple was bru-

* More of the *voyageurs'* romance; named because of a voice heard calling and calling across the lake as *voyageurs* entered the valley—said to be the spirit of an Indian girl calling her lover, though prosaic sense explains it was the echo of the *voyageurs'* song among the hills.

tally murdered by one of the Deschamps family, who ran from body to body, perpetrating the crimes of ghouls. It was in vain for Grant to expostulate. The wild blood of a savage race had been roused. The soft velvet night of the summer prairie, with the winds crooning the sad monotone of a limitless sea, closed over a scene of savages drunk with slaughter, of men gone mad with the madness of murder, of warriors thinking to gain courage by drinking the blood of the slain.

Grant saved the settlers' lives by sending them down-stream to Lake Winnipeg, where dwelt the friendly Chief Peguis. On the river they met the indomitable Miles MacDonell, posting back to resume authority. He brought news that must have been good cheer. Moved by the expelled governor's account of disorders, Lord Selkirk was hastening north, armed with the authority of a justice of the peace, escorted by soldiers in full regalia as became his station, with cannon mounted on his barges and stores of munition that ill agreed with the professions of a peaceful justice.

The time has gone past for quibbling as to the earl's motives in pushing north armed like a lord of war. MacDonell hastened back and met him with his army of Des Meurons* at the Sault. In August Lord Selkirk appeared before Fort William with uniformed soldiers in eleven boats. The justice of the peace set his soldiers digging trenches opposite the Nor' Westers' fort. As for the Nor' Westers, they had had enough of blood. They capitulated without one blow. Selkirk took full possession.

* Continental soldiers disbanded after the Napoleonic wars.

Six months later (1817), when ice had closed the rivers, he sent Captain d'Orsennens overland westward to Red River, where Fort Douglas was captured back one stormy winter night by the soldiers scaling the fort walls during a heavy snowfall. The conflict had been just as ruthless on the Saskatchewan. Nor' Westers were captured as they disembarked to pass Grand Rapids and shipped down to York Factory, where Franklin the explorer saw four Nor' Westers maltreated. One of them was the same John George MacTavish who had helped to capture Astoria; another, Frobisher, a partner, was ultimately done to death by the abuse. The Deschamps murderers of Seven Oaks fled south, where their crimes brought terrible vengeance from American traders.

Victorious all along the line, the Hudson's Bay Company were in a curious quandary. Suits enough were pressing in the courts to ruin both companies; and for the most natural reason in the world, neither Hudson Bay nor Nor' Wester could afford to have the truth told and the crimes probed. There was only one way out of the dilemma. In March, 1821, the companies amalgamated under the old title of Hudson's Bay. In April, 1822, a new fort was built half-way between the sites of Gibraltar and Fort Douglas, and given the new name of Fort Garry by Sir George Simpson, the governor, to remove all feeling of resentment. The thousand men thrown out of employment by the union at once crossed the line and enlisted with American traders.

The Hudson's Bay was now strong with the strength that comes from victorious conflict—so strong, indeed, that it not only held the Canadian field, but in spite

of the American law* forbidding British traders in the United States, reached as far south as Utah and the Missouri, where it once more had a sharp brush with lusty rivals.

* A law that could not, of course, be enforced, except as to the building of permanent forts, in regions beyond the reach of law's enforcement.

CHAPTER V

MR. ASTOR'S COMPANY ENCOUNTERS NEW OPPONENTS

THAT Andrew Henry whom Lisa had sought when he pursued the Astorians up the Missouri continued to be dogged by misfortune on the west side of the mountains. Game was scarce and his half-starving followers were scattered, some to the British posts in the north, some to the Spaniards in the south, and some to the nameless graves of the mountains. Henry forced his way back over the divide and met Lisa in the Ari-cara country. The British war broke out and the Missouri Company were compelled to abandon the dangerous territory of the Blackfeet, who could purchase arms from the British traders, raid the Americans, and scurry back to Canada.

When Lisa died in 1820 more than three hundred Missouri men were again in the mountains; but they suffered the same ill luck. Jones and Immel's party were annihilated by the Blackfeet; and Pilcher, who succeeded to Lisa's position and dauntlessly crossed over to the Columbia, had all his supplies stolen, reaching the Hudson's Bay post, Fort Colville, almost destitute. The British rivals received him with that hospitality for which they were renowned when trade was not involved, and gave him escort up the Columbia, down the Athabasca and Saskatchewan to

Red River, thence overland to the Mandan country and St. Louis.

These two disasters marked the wane of the Missouri Company.

But like the shipwrecked sailor, no sooner safe on land than he must to sea again, the indomitable Andrew Henry linked his fortunes with General Ashley of St. Louis. Gathering to the new standard Campbell, Bridger, Fitzpatrick, Beckworth, Smith, and the Sublettes—men who made the Rocky Mountain trade famous—Ashley and Henry led one hundred men to the mountains the first year and two hundred the next. In that time not less than twenty-five lives were lost among Aricaras and Blackfeet. Few pelts were obtained and the expeditions were a loss.

But in 1824 came a change. Smith met Hudson's Bay trappers loaded with beaver pelts in the Columbia basin, west of the Rockies. They had become separated from their leader, Alexander Ross, an old Astorian. Details of this bargain will never be known; but when Smith came east he had the Hudson's Bay furs. This was the first brush between Rocky Mountain men and the Hudson's Bay, and the mountain trappers scored.

Henceforth, to save time, the active trappers met their supplies annually at a *rendezvous* in the mountains, in Pierre's Hole, a broad valley below the Tetons, or Jackson's Hole, east of the former, or Ogden's Hole at Salt Lake. Seventeen Rocky Mountain men had been massacred by the Snake Indians in the Columbia basin; but that did not deter General Ashley himself from going up the Platte, across the divide to Salt Lake. Here he found Peter Ogden, a Hudson's Bay trapper, with an enormous prize of beaver pelts. When the Hud-

son's Bay man left Salt Lake, he had no furs; and when General Ashley came away, his packers were laden with a quarter of a million dollars worth of pelts. This was the second brush between Rocky Mountain and Hudson's Bay, and again the mountaineers scored.

The third encounter was more to the credit of both companies. After three years' wanderings, Smith found himself stranded and destitute at the British post of Fort Vancouver. Fifteen of his men had been killed, his horses taken and peltries stolen. The Hudson's Bay sent a punitive force to recover his property, gave him a \$20,000 draft for the full value of the recovered furs, and sent him up the Columbia. Thenceforth Rocky Mountain trappers and Hudson's Bay respected each other's rights in the valley of the Columbia, but southward the old code prevailed. Fitzpatrick, a Rocky Mountain trader, came on the same poor Peter Ogden at Salt Lake trading with the Indians, and at once plied the argument of whisky so actively that the furs destined for Red River went over the mountains to St. Louis.

The trapper probably never heard of a Nemesis; but a curious retribution seemed to follow on the heels of outrage.

Lisa had tried to balk the Astorians, and the Missouri Company went down before Indian hostility. The Nor' Westers jockeyed the Astorians out of their possessions and were in league with murderers at the massacre of Seven Oaks; but the Nor' Westers were jockeyed out of existence by the Hudson's Bay under Lord Selkirk. The Hudson's Bay had been guilty of rank outrage—particularly on the Saskatchewan, where North-West partners were seized, manacled, and sent

to a wilderness—and now the Hudson's Bay were cheated, cajoled, overreached by the Rocky Mountain trappers. And the Rocky Mountain trappers, in their turn, met a rival that could outcheat their cheateries.

In 1831 the mountains were overrun with trappers from all parts of America. Men from every State in the Union, those restless spirits who have pioneered every great movement of the race, turned their faces to the wilderness for furs as a later generation was to scramble for gold.

In the summer of 1832, when the hunters came down to Pierre's Hole for their supplies, there were trappers who had never before summered away from Detroit and Mackinaw and Hudson Bay.* There were half-wild Frenchmen from Quebec who had married Indian wives and cast off civilization as an ill-fitting garment. There were Indian hunters with the mellow, rhythmic tones that always betray native blood. There were lank New Englanders under Wyeth of Boston, erect as a mast pole, strong of jaw, angular of motion, taking clumsily to buckskins. There were the Rocky Mountain men in tattered clothes, with unkempt hair and long beards, and a trick of peering from their bushy brows like an enemy from ambush. There were probably odd detachments from Captain Bonneville's adventurers on the Platte, where a gay army adventurer was trying his luck as fur trader and explorer. And there was a new set of men, not yet weather-worn by the wilderness, alert, watchful, ubiquitous, scattering themselves among all groups where they could hear everything, see all, tell nothing, always shadowing the Rocky Mountain men who knew every trail of the wilds

* For example, the Deschamps of Red River.

and should be good pilots to the best hunting-grounds. By the middle of July all business had been completed, and the trappers spent a last night round camp-fires, spinning yarns of the hunt.

Early in the morning when the Rocky Mountain men were sallying from the valley, they met a cavalcade of one hundred and fifty Blackfeet. Each party halted to survey its opponent. In less than ten years the Rocky Mountain men had lost more than seventy comrades among hostiles. Even now the Indians were flourishing a flag captured from murdered Hudson's Bay hunters.

The number of whites disconcerted the Indians. Their warlike advance gave place to friendliness. One chief came forward with the hand of comity extended. The whites were not deceived. Many a time had Rocky Mountain trappers been lured to their death by such overtures.

No excuse is offered for the hunters. The code of the wilderness never lays the unction of a hypocritical excuse to conscience. The trappers sent two scouts to parley with the detested enemy. One trapper, with Indian blood in his veins and Indian thirst for the avengement of a kinsman's death in his heart, grasped the chief's extended hand with the clasp of a steel trap. On the instant the other scout fired. The powerless chief fell dead; and using their horses as a breastwork, the Blackfeet hastily threw themselves behind some timber, cast up trenches, and shot from cover.

All the trappers at the *rendezvous* spurred to the fight, priming guns, casting off valuables, making their wills as they rode. The battle lasted all day; and when under cover of night the Indians withdrew, twelve men

lay dead on the trappers' side, as many more were wounded; and the Blackfeet's loss was twice as great. For years this tribe exacted heavy atonement for the death of warriors behind the trenches of Pierre's Hole.

Leaving Pierre's Hole the mountaineers scattered to their rocky fastnesses, but no sooner had they pitched camp on good hunting-grounds than the strangers who had shadowed them at the *rendezvous* came up. Breaking camp, the Rocky Mountain men would steal away by new and unknown passes to another valley. A day or two later, having followed by tent-poles dragging the ground, or brushwood broken by the passing packers, the pertinacious rivals would reappear. This went on persistently for three months.

Infuriated by such tactics, the mountaineers planned to lead the spies a dance. Plunging into the territory of hostiles they gave their pursuers the slip. Neither party probably intended that matters should become serious; but that is always the fault of the white man when he plays the dangerous game of war with Indians. The spying party was ambushed, the leader slain, his flesh torn from his body and his skeleton thrown into the river. A few months later the Rocky Mountain traders paid for this escapade. Fitzpatrick, the same trapper who had "lifted" Ogden's furs and led this game against the spies, was robbed among Indians instigated by white men of the American Fur Company. This marked the beginning of the end with the Rocky Mountain trappers.

The American Fur Company, which Mr. Astor had organized and stuck to through good repute and evil repute, was now officered by Ramsay Crooks and Farn-

ham and Robert Stuart, who had remained loyal to Mr. Astor in Astoria and been schooled in a discipline that offered no quarter to enemies. The purchase of the Mackinaw Company gave the American Company all those posts between the Great Lakes and the height of land dividing the Mississippi and Missouri. When Congress excluded foreign traders in 1816, all the Nor' Westers' posts south of the boundary fell to the American Fur Company; and sturdy old Nor' Westers, who had been thrown out by the amalgamation with the Hudson's Bay, also added to the Americans' strength. Kenneth MacKenzie, with Laidlaw, Lamont, and Kipp, had a line of posts from Green Bay to the Missouri held by an American to evade the law, but known as the Columbia Company.

This organization* the American Fur Company bought out, placing MacKenzie at the mouth of the Yellowstone, where he built Fort Union and became the Pooh-Bah of the whole region, living in regal style like his ancestral Scottish chiefs. "King of the Missouri" white men called him, "big Indian me" the Blackfeet said; and "big Indian me" he was to them, for he was the first trader to win both their friendship and the Crows'.

Here MacKenzie entertained Prince Maximilian of Wied and Catlin the artist and Audubon the naturalist, and had as his constant companion Hamilton, an English nobleman living in disguise and working for the fur company. Many an unmeant melodrama was enacted under the walls of Union in MacKenzie's reign.

Once a free trapper came floating down the Mis-

* Chittenden.

souri with his canoe full of beaver-pelts, which he quickly exchanged for the gay attire to be obtained at Fort Union. Oddly enough, though the fellow was a French-Canadian, he had long, flaxen hair, of which he was inordinately vain. Strutting about the court-yard, feeling himself a very prince of importance, he saw MacKenzie's pretty young Indian wife. Each paid the other the tribute of adoration that was warmer than it was wise. The *dénouement* was a vision of the flaxen-haired Siegfried sprinting at the top of his speed through the fort gate, with the irate MacKenzie flourishing a flail to the rear. The matter did not end here. The outraged Frenchman swore to kill MacKenzie on sight, and haunted the fort gates with a loaded rifle till MacKenzie was obliged to hire a mulatto servant to "wing" the fellow with a shot in the shoulder, when he was brought into the fort, nursed back to health, and sent away.

At another time two Rocky Mountain trappers built an opposition fort just below Union and lay in wait for the coming of the Blackfeet to trade with the American Fur Company. MacKenzie posted a lookout on his bastion. The moment the Indians were descried, out sallied from Fort Union a band in full regalia, with drum and trumpet and piccolo and fife—wonders that would have lured the astonished Indians to perdition. Behind the band came gaudy presents for the savages, and what was not supposed to be in the Indian country—liquor. When these methods failed to outbuy rivals, MacKenzie did not hesitate to pay twelve dollars for a beaver-skin not worth two. The Rocky Mountain trappers were forced to capitulate, and their post passed over to the American Fur Company.

In the ruins of their post was enacted a fitting *finale* to the turbulent conflicts of the American traders. The Deschamps family, who had perpetrated the worst butcheries on the field of Seven Oaks, in the fight between Hudson's Bay and Nor' Westers, had acted as interpreters for the Rocky Mountain trappers. boastful of their murderous record in Canada, the father, mother, and eight grown children were usually so violent in their carousals that Hamilton, the English gentleman, used to quiet their outrage and prevent trouble by dropping laudanum in their cups. Once they slept so heavily that the whole fort was in a panic lest their sleep lasted to eternity; but the revellers came to life defiant as ever. At Union was a very handsome young half-breed fellow by the name of Gardepie, whose life the Deschamps harpies attempted to take from sheer jealousy and love of crime. Joined by two free trappers, Gardepie killed the elder Deschamps one morning at breakfast with all the gruesome mutilation of Indian custom. He at the same time wounded a younger son. Spurred by the hag-like mother and nerved to the deed with alcohol, the Deschamps undertook to avenge their father's death by killing all the whites of the fur post. One man had fallen when the alarm was carried to Fort Union.

Twice had the Deschamps robbed Fort Union. Many trappers had been assassinated by a Deschamps. Indians had been flogged by them for no other purpose than to inflict torture. Beating on the doors of Fort Union, the wife of their last victim called out that the Deschamps were on the war-path.

The traders of Fort Union solemnly raised hands and took an oath to exterminate the murderous clan.

The affair had gone beyond MacKenzie's control. Seizing cannon and ammunition, the traders crossed the prairie to the abandoned fort of the Rocky Mountain trappers, where the murderers were intrenched. All valuables were removed from the fort. Time was given for the family to prepare for death. Then the guns were turned on the house. Suddenly that old harpy of crime, the mother, rushed out, holding forward the Indian pipe of peace and begging for mercy.

She got all the mercy that she had ever given, and fell shot through the heart.

At last the return firing ceased. Who would enter and learn if the Deschamps were all dead? Treachery was feared. The assailants set fire to the fort. In the light of the flames one man was espied crouching in the bastion. A trader rushed forward exultant to shoot the last of the Deschamps; but a shot from the bastion sent him leaping five feet into the air to fall back dead, and a yell of fiendish victory burst from the burning tower.*

Again the assailants fired a volley. No answering shot came from the fort. Rushing through the smoke the traders found François Deschamps backed up in a corner like a beast at bay, one wrist broken and all ammunition gone. A dozen rifle-shots cracked sharp. The fellow fell and his body was thrown into the flames. The old mother was buried without shroud or coffin in the clay bank of the river. A young boy mortally wounded was carried from the ruins to die in Union.

* Larpenteur, who was there, has given even a more circumstantial account of this terrible tragedy.

This dark act marked the last important episode in the long conflict among traders. A decline of values followed the civil war. Settlers were rushing overland to Oregon, and Fort Union went into the control of the militia. To-day St. Louis is still a centre of trade in manufactured furs, and St. Paul yet receives raw pelts from trappers who wander through the forests of Minnesota and Idaho and the mountains. Only a year ago the writer employed as guides in the mountains three trappers who have spent their lives ranging the northern wilds and the Upper Missouri; but outside the mountain and forest wastes, the vast hunting-grounds of the famous old trappers have been chalked off by the fences of settlers.

In Canada, too, bloodshed marked the last of the conflict—once in the seventies when Louis Riel, a half-breed demagogue, roused the Metis against the surveyors sent to prepare Red River for settlement, and again in 1885 when this unhanged rascal incited the half-breeds of the Saskatchewan to rebellion over title-deeds to their lands. Though the Hudson's Bay Company had nothing to do with either complaint, the conflict waged round their forts.

In the first affair the ragged army of rebels took possession of Fort Garry, and for no other reason than the love of killing that riots in savage blood as in a wolf's, shot down Scott outside the fort gates. In the second rebellion Riel's allies came down on the far-isolated Fort Pitt three hundred strong, captured the fort, and took the factor, Mr. MacLean, and his family to northern wastes, marching them through swamps breast-high with spring floods, where General Middleton's troops could not follow. The children of the fam-

ily had been in the habit of bribing old Indian gossips into telling stories by gifts of tobacco; and the friendship now stood the white family in good stead. Day and night in all the weeks of captivity the friendly Indians never left the side of the trader's family, slipping between the hostiles and the young children, standing guard at the tepee door, giving them weapons of defence till all were safely back among the whites.

This time Riel was hanged, and the Hudson's Bay Company resumed its sway of all that realm between Labrador and the Pacific north of the Saskatchewan.

Traders' lives are like a white paper with a black spot. The world looks only at the black spot.

In spite of his faults when in conflict with rivals, it has been the trader living alone, unprotected and unfearing, one voice among a thousand, who has restrained the Indian tribes from massacres that would have rolled back the progress of the West a quarter of a century.

CHAPTER VI

THE FRENCH TRAPPER

To live hard and die hard, king in the wilderness and pauper in the town, lavish to-day and penniless to-morrow—such was the life of the most picturesque figure in America's history.

Take a map of America. Put your finger on any point between the Gulf of Mexico and Hudson Bay, or the Great Lakes and the Rockies. Ask who was the first man to blaze a trail into this wilderness; and wherever you may point, the answer is the same—the French trapper.

Impoverished English noblemen of the seventeenth century took to freebooting, Spanish dons to piracy and search for gold; but for the young French *noblesse* the way to fortune was by the fur trade. Freedom from restraint, quick wealth, lavish spending, and adventurous living all appealed to a class that hated the menial and slow industry of the farm. The only capital required for the fur trade was dauntless courage. Merchants were keen to supply money enough to stock canoes with provisions for trade in the wilderness. What would be equivalent to \$5,000 of modern money was sufficient to stock four trappers with trade enough for two years.

At the end of that time the sponsors looked for re-

turns in furs to the value of eight hundred per cent on their capital. The original investment would be deducted, and the enormous profit divided among the trappers and their outfitters. In the heyday of the fur trade, when twenty beaver-skins were got for an axe, it was no unusual thing to see a trapper receive what would be equivalent to \$3,000 of our money as his share of two years' trapping. But in the days when the French were only beginning to advance up the Missouri from Louisiana and across from Michilimackinac to the Mississippi vastly larger fortunes were made.

Two partners * have brought out as much as \$200,000 worth of furs from the great game preserve between Lake Superior and the head waters of the Missouri after eighteen months' absence from St. Louis or from Montreal. The fur country was to the young French nobility what a treasure-ship was to a pirate. In vain France tried to keep her colonists on the land by forbidding trade without a license. Fines, the galleys for life, even death for repeated offence, were the punishments held over the head of the illicit trader. The French trapper evaded all these by staying in the wilds till he amassed fortune enough to buy off punishment, or till he had lost taste for civilized life and remained in the wilderness, *courieur des bois, voyageur*, or leader of a band of half-wild retainers whom he ruled like a feudal baron, becoming a curious connecting link between the savagery of the New World and the *noblesse* of the Old.

Duluth, of the Lakes region; La Salle, of the Mis-

* Radisson and Groseillers, from regions westward of Duluth.

sissippi; Le Moyne d'Iberville, ranging from Louisiana to Hudson Bay; La Mothe Cadillac in Michilimackinac, Detroit, and Louisiana; La Vérendrye exploring from Lake Superior to the Rockies; Radisson on Hudson Bay—all won their fame as explorers and discoverers in pursuit of the fur trade. A hundred years before any English mind knew of the Missouri, French *voyageurs* had gone beyond the Yellowstone. Before the regions now called Minnesota, Dakota, and Wisconsin were known to New Englanders, the French were trapping about the head waters of the Mississippi; and two centuries ago a company of daring French hunters went to New Mexico to spy on Spanish trade.

East of the Mississippi were two neighbours whom the French trapper shunned—the English colonists and the Iroquois. North of the St. Lawrence was a power that he shunned still more—the French governor, who had legal right to plunder the peltries of all who traded and trapped without license. But between St. Louis and MacKenzie River was a great unclaimed wilderness, whence came the best furs.

Naturally, this became the hunting-ground of the French trapper.

There were four ways by which he entered his hunting-ground: (1) Sailing from Quebec to the mouth of the Mississippi, he ascended the river in pirogue or dugout, but this route was only possible for a man with means to pay for the ocean voyage. (2) From Detroit overland to the Illinois, or Ohio, which he rafted down to the Mississippi, and then taking to canoe turned north. (3) From Michilimackinac, which was always a grand *rendezvous* for the French and Indian hunters, to Green Bay on Lake Michigan, thence up-stream to

Fox River, overland to the Wisconsin, and down-stream to the Mississippi. (4) Up the Ottawa through "the Soo" to Lake Superior and westward to the hunting-ground. Whichever way he went his course was mainly up-stream and north: hence the name *Pays d'en Haut* vaguely designated the vast hunting-ground that lay between the Missouri and the MacKenzie River.

The French trapper was and is to-day as different from the English as the gamester is from the merchant. Of all the fortunes brought from the Missouri to St. Louis, or from the *Pays d'en Haut* to Montreal, few escaped the gaming-table and dram-shop. Where the English trader saves his returns, Pierre lives high and plays high, and lords it about the fur post till he must pawn the gay clothing he has bought for means to exist to the opening of the next hunting season.

It is now that he goes back to some birch tree marked by him during the preceding winter's hunt, peels the bark off in a great seamless rind, whittles out ribs for a canoe from cedar, ash, or pine, and shapes the green bark to the curve of a canoe by means of stakes and stones down each side. Lying on his back in the sun spinning yarns of the great things he has done and will do, he lets the birch harden and dry to the proper form, when he fits the gunwales to the ragged edge, lines the inside of the keel with thin pine boards, and tars the seams where the bark has crinkled and split at the junction with the gunwale.

It is in the idle summer season that he and his squaw—for the Pierre adapts, or rather adopts, himself to the native tribes by taking an Indian wife—design the wonderfully bizarre costumes in which the

French trapper appears: the beaded toque for festive occasions, the gay moccasins, the buckskin suit fringed with horse-hair and leather in lieu of the Indian scalp-locks, the white caribou capote with horned head-gear to deceive game on the hunter's approach, the powder-case made of a buffalo-horn, the bullet bag of a young otter-skin, the musk-rat or musquash cap, and great gantlets coming to the elbow.

None of these things does the English trader do. If he falls a victim to the temptations awaiting the man from the wilderness in the dram-shop of the trading-post, he takes good care not to spend his all on the spree. He does not affect the hunter's decoy dress, for the simple reason that he prefers to let the Indians do the hunting of the difficult game, while he attends to the trapping that is *gain* rather than *game*. For clothes, he is satisfied with cheap material from the shops. And if, like Pierre, the Englishman marries an Indian wife, he either promptly deserts her when he leaves the fur country for the trading-post or sends her to a convent to be educated up to his own level. With Pierre the marriage means that he has cast off the last vestige of civilization and henceforth identifies himself with the life of the savage.

After the British conquest of Canada and the American Declaration of Independence came a change in the status of the French trapper. Before, he had been lord of the wilderness without a rival. Now, powerful English companies poured their agents into his hunting-grounds. Before, he had been a partner in the fur trade. Now, he must either be pushed out or enlist as servant to the newcomer. He who had once come to Montreal and St. Louis with a fortune of pel-

tries on his rafts and canoes, now signed with the great English companies for a paltry one, two, and three hundred dollars a year.

It was but natural in the new state of things that the French trapper, with all his knowledge of forest and stream, should become *courieur des bois* and *voyageur*, while the Englishman remained the barterer. In the Mississippi basin the French trappers mainly enlisted with four companies: the Mackinaw Company, radiating from Michilimackinac to the Mississippi; the American Company, up the Missouri; the Missouri Company, officered by St. Louis merchants, westward to the Rockies; and the South-West Company, which was John Jacob Astor's amalgamation of the American and Mackinaw. In Canada the French sided with the Nor' Westers and X. Y.'s, who had sprung up in opposition to the great English Hudson's Bay Company.

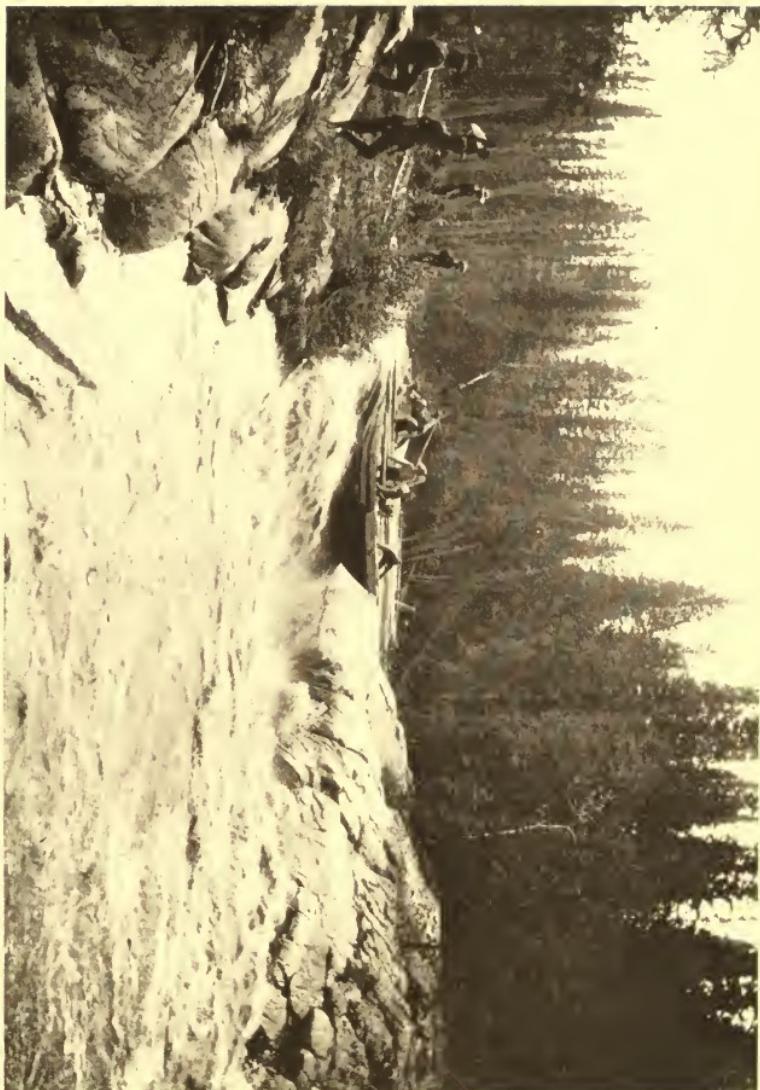
Though he had become a burden-carrier for his quondam enemies, the French trapper still saw life through the glamour of *la gloire* and *noblesse*, still lived hard and died game, still feasted to-day and starved to-morrow, gambled the clothes off his back and laughed at hardship; courted danger and trolled off one of his *chansons* brought over to America by ancestors of Normandy, uttered an oath in one breath at the whirlpool ahead and in the next crossed himself reverently with a prayer to Sainte Anne, the *voyageurs'* saint, just before his canoe took the plunge.

Your Spanish grandee of the Missouri Company, like Manuel Lisa of St. Louis, might sit in a counting-house or fur post adding up rows of figures, and your Scotch merchant chaffer with Indians over the value

of a beaver-skin. As for Pierre, give him a canoe sliding past wooded banks with a throb of the keel to the current and the whistle of wild-fowl overhead; clear sky above with a feathering of wind clouds, clear sky below with a feathering of wind clouds, and the canoe between like a bird at poise. Sometimes a fair wind livens the pace; for the *voyageurs* hoist a blanket sail, and the canoe skims before the breeze like a sea-gull.

Where the stream gathers force and whirls forward in sharp eddies and racing leaps each *voyageur* knows what to expect. No man asks questions. The bowman stands up with his eyes to the fore and steel-shod pole ready. Every eye is on that pole. Presently comes a roar, and the green banks begin to race. The canoe no longer glides. It vaults—springs—bounds, with a shiver of live waters under the keel and a buoyant rise to her prow that mounts the crest of each wave fast as wave pursues wave. A fanged rock thrusts up in mid-stream. One deft push of the pole. Each paddler takes the cue; and the canoe shoots past the danger straight as an arrow, righting herself to a new course by another lightning sweep of the pole and paddles.

But the waters gather as if to throw themselves forward. The roar becomes a crash. As if moved by one mind the paddlers brace back. The lightened bow lifts. A white dash of spray. She mounts as she plunges; and the *voyageurs* are whirling down-stream below a small waterfall. Not a word is spoken to indicate that it is anything unusual to *sauter les rapides*, as the *voyageurs* say. The men are soaked. Now, perhaps, some one laughs; for Jean, or Ba'tiste, or the dandy of the



Traders running a mackinaw or keel-boat down the rapids of Slave River without unloading.



crew, got his moccasins wet when the canoe took water. They all settle forward. One paddler pauses to bail out water with his hat.

Thus the lowest waterfalls are run without a *portage*. Coming back this way with canoes loaded to the water-line, there must be a disembarking. If the rapids be short, with water enough to carry the loaded canoe high above rocks that might graze the bark, all hands spring out in the water, but one man who remains to steady the craft; and the canoe is "tracked" up-stream, hauled along by ropes. If the rapids be at all dangerous, each *voyageur* lands, with pack on his back and pack-straps across his forehead, and runs along the shore. A long *portage* is measured by the number of pipes the *voyageur* smokes, each lighting up meaning a brief rest; and a *portage* of many "pipes" will be taken at a running gait on the hottest days without one word of complaint. Nine miles is the length of one famous *portage* opposite the Chaudière Falls on the Ottawa.

In winter the *voyageur* becomes *courieur des bois* to his new masters. Then for six months endless reaches, white, snow-padded, silent; forests wreathed and bossed with snow; nights in camp on a couch of pines or rolled in robes with a roaring fire to keep the wolves off, melting snow steaming to the heat, meat sputtering at the end of a skewered stick; sometimes to the *marche donc! marche donc!* of the driver, with crisp tinkling of dog-bells in frosty air, a long journey overland by dog-sled to the trading-post; sometimes that blinding fury which sweeps over the northland, turning earth and air to a white darkness; sometimes a belated traveller cowering under a snow-drift for

warmth and wrapping his blanket about him to cross life's Last Divide.

These things were the every-day life of the French trapper.

At present there is only one of the great fur companies remaining—the Hudson's Bay of Canada. In the United States there are only two important centres of trade in furs which are not imported—St. Paul and St. Louis. For both the Hudson's Bay Company and the fur traders of the Upper Missouri the French trapper still works as his ancestors did for the great companies a hundred years ago.

The roadside tramp of to-day is a poor representative of Robin Hoods and Rob Roys; and the French trapper of shambling gait and baggy clothes seen at the fur posts of the north to-day is a poor type of the class who used to stalk through the baronial halls * of Montreal's governor like a lord and set the rafters of Fort William's council chamber ringing, and make the wine and the money and the brawls of St. Louis a by-word.

And yet, with all his degeneracy, the French trapper retains a something of his old traditions. A few years ago I was on a northern river steamer going to one of the Hudson's Bay trading-posts. A brawl seemed to sound from the steerage passengers. What was the matter? "Oh," said the captain, "the French trappers going out north for the winter, drunk as usual!"

* Especially the Château de Ramezay, where great underground vaults were built for the storing of pelts in case of attack from New Englander and Iroquois. These vaults may still be seen under Château de Ramezay.

As he spoke, a voice struck up one of those *chansons populaires*, which have been sung by every generation of *voyageurs* since Frenchmen came to America, *A La Claire Fontaine*, a song which the French trappers' ancestors brought from Normandy hundreds of years ago, about the fickle lady and the faded roses and the vain regrets. Then—was it possible?—these grizzled fellows, dressed in tinkers' tatters, were singing—what? A song of the *Grand Monarque* which has led armies to battle, but not a song which one would expect to hear in northern wilds—

“Malbrouck s’on va-t-en guerre
Mais quand reviendra a-t-il ?”

Three foes assailed the trapper alone in the wilds. The first danger was from the wolf-pack. The second was the Indian hostile egged on by rival traders. This danger the French trapper minimized by identifying himself more completely with the savage than any other fur trader succeeded in doing. The third foe was the most perverse and persevering thief known outside the range of human criminals.

Perhaps the day after the trapper had shot his first deer he discovered fine footprints like a child's hand on the snow around the carcass. He recognises the trail of otter or pekan or mink. It would be useless to bait a deadfall with meat when an unpolluted feast lies on the snow. The man takes one of his small traps and places it across the line of approach. This trap is buried beneath snow or brush. Every trace of man-smell is obliterated. The fresh hide of a deer may be dragged across the snow. Pomatum or castoreum may be daubed on everything touched. He may



even handle the trap with deer-hide. Pekan travel in pairs. Besides, the dead deer will be likely to attract more than one forager; so the man sets a circle of traps round the carcass.

The next morning he comes back with high hope. Very little of the deer remains. All the flesh-eaters of the forest, big and little, have been there. Why, then, is there no capture? One trap has been pulled up, sprung, and partly broken. Another carried a little distance off and dumped into a hollow. A third had caught a pekan; but the prisoner had been worried and torn to atoms. Another was tampered with from behind and exposed for very deviltry. Some have disappeared altogether.

Among forest creatures few are mean enough to kill when they have full stomachs, or to eat a trapped brother with untrapped meat a nose-length away.

The French trapper rumbles out some maledictions on *le sacré carcajou*. Taking a piece of steel like a cheese-tester's instrument, he pokes grains of strychnine into the remaining meat. He might have saved himself the trouble. The next day he finds the poisoned meat mauled and spoiled so that no animal will touch it. There is nothing of the deer but picked bones. So the trapper tries a deadfall for the thief. Again he might have spared himself the trouble. His next visit shows the deadfall torn from behind and robbed without danger to the thief.

Several signs tell the trapper that the marauder is the carcajou or wolverine. All the stealing was done at night; and the wolverine is nocturnal. All the traps had been approached from behind. The wolverine will not cross man's track. The poison in the meat had

been scented. Whether the wolverine knows poison, he is too wary to experiment on doubtful diet. The exposing of the traps tells of the curiosity which characterizes the wolverine. Other creatures would have had too much fear. The tracks run back to cover, and not across country like the badger's or the fox's.

Fearless, curious, gluttonous, wary, and suspicious, the mischief-maker and the freebooter and the criminal of the animal world, a scavenger to save the northland from pollution of carrion, and a scourge to destroy wounded, weaklings, and laggards—the wolverine has the nose of a fox, with long, uneven, tusk-like teeth that seem to be expressly made for tearing. The eyes are well set back, greenish, alert with almost human intelligence of the type that preys. Out of the fulness of his wrath one trapper gave a perfect description of the wolverine. He didn't object, he said, to being outrun by a wolf, or beaten by a respectable Indian, but to be outwitted by a little beast the size of a pig with the snout of a fox, the claws of a bear, and the fur of a porcupine's quills, was more than he could stand.

In the economy of nature the wolverine seems to have but one design—destruction. Beaver-dams two feet thick and frozen like rock yield to the ripping onslaught of its claws. He robs everything: the muskrats' haycock houses; the gopher burrows; the cached elk and buffalo calves under hiding of some shrub while the mothers go off to the watering-place; the traps of his greatest foe, man; the cached provisions of the forest ranger; the graves of the dead; the very tepees and lodges and houses of Indian, half-breed, and white man. While the wolverine is averse to crossing man's track, he will follow it for days, like a shark

behind a ship; for he knows as well as the man knows there will be food in the traps when the man is in his lodge, and food in the lodge when the man is at the traps.

But the wolverine has two characteristics by which he may be snared—gluttony and curiosity.

After the deer has disappeared the trapper finds that the wolverine has been making as regular rounds of the traps as he has himself. It is then a question whether the man or the wolverine is to hold the hunting-ground. A case is on record at Moose Factory, on James Bay, of an Indian hunter and his wife who were literally brought to the verge of starvation by a wolverine that nightly destroyed their traps. The contest ended by the starving Indians travelling a hundred miles from the haunts of that “bad devil—oh—he—bad devil—caraçou!” Remembering the curiosity and gluttony of his enemy, the man sets out his strongest steel-traps. He takes some strong-smelling meat, bacon or fish, and places it where the wolverine tracks run. Around this he sets a circle of his traps, tying them securely to poles and saplings and stakes. In all likelihood he has waited his chance for a snowfall which will cover traces of the man-smell.

Night passes. In the morning the man comes to his traps. The meat has been taken. All else is as before. Not a track marks the snow; but in midwinter meat does not walk off by itself. The man warily feels for the hidden traps. Then he notices that one of the stakes has been pulled up and carried off. That is a sign. He prods the ground expectantly. It is as he thought. One trap is gone. It had caught the wolverine; but the cunning beast had pulled with all his

strength, snapped the attached sapling, and escaped. A fox or beaver would have gnawed the imprisoned limb off. The wolverine picks the trap up in his teeth and hobbles as hard as three legs will carry him to the hiding of a bush, or better still, to the frozen surface of a river, hidden by high banks, with glare ice which will not reveal a trail. But on the river the man finds only a trap wrenched out of all semblance to its proper shape, with the spring opened to release the imprisoned leg.

The wolverine had been caught, and had gone to the river to study out the problem of unclinchng the spring.

One more device remains to the man. It is a gun trick. The loaded weapon is hidden full-cock under leaves or brush. Directly opposite the barrel is the bait, attached by a concealed string to the trigger. The first pull will blow the thief's head off.

The trap experience would have frightened any other animals a week's run from man's tracks; but the wolverine grows bolder, and the trapper knows he will find his snares robbed until carcajou has been killed.

Perhaps he has tried the gun trick before, to have the cord gnawed through and the bait stolen. A wolverine is not to be easily tricked; but its gluttony and curiosity bring it within man's reach.

The man watches until he knows the part of the woods where the wolverine nightly gallops. He then procures a savoury piece of meat heavy enough to balance a cocked trigger, not heavy enough to send it off. The gun is suspended from some dense evergreen, which will hide the weapon. The bait hangs from the trigger above the wolverine's reach.

Then a curious game begins.

One morning the trapper sees the wolverine tracks round and round the tree as if determined to ferret out the mystery of the meat in mid-air.

The next morning the tracks have come to a stand below the meat. If the wolverine could only get up to the bait, one whiff would tell him whether the man-smell was there. He sits studying the puzzle till his mark is deep printed in the snow.

The trapper smiles. He has only to wait.

The rascal may become so bold in his predatory visits that the man may be tempted to chance a shot without waiting.

But if the man waits Nemesis hangs at the end of the cord. There comes a night when the wolverine's curiosity is as rampant as his gluttony. A quick clutch of the ripping claws and a blare of fire-smoke blows the robber's head into space.

The trapper will hold those hunting-grounds.

He has got rid of the most unwelcome visitor a solitary man ever had; but for the consolation of those whose sympathies are keener for the animal than the man, it may be said that in the majority of such contests it is the wolverine and not the man that wins.

CHAPTER VII

THE BUFFALO-RUNNERS

IF the trapper had a crest like the knights of the wilderness who lived lives of daredoing in olden times, it should represent a canoe, a snow-shoe, a musket, a beaver, and a buffalo. While the beaver was his quest and the coin of the fur-trading realm, the buffalo was the great staple on which the very existence of the trapper depended.

Bed and blankets and clothing, shields for wartime, sinew for bows, bone for the shaping of rude lance-heads, kettles and bull-boats and saddles, roof and rug and curtain wall for the hunting lodge, and, most important of all, food that could be kept in any climate for any length of time and combined the lightest weight with the greatest nourishment—all these were supplied by the buffalo.

From the Gulf of Mexico to the Saskatchewan and from the Alleghanies to the Rockies the buffalo was to the hunter what wheat is to the farmer. Moose and antelope and deer were plentiful in the limited area of a favoured habitat. Provided with water and grass the buffalo could thrive in any latitude south of the sixties, with a preference for the open ground of the great central plains except when storms and heat drove the herds to the shelter of woods and valleys.

Besides, in that keen struggle for existence which goes on in the animal world, the buffalo had strength to defy all enemies. Of all the creatures that prey, only the full-grown grisly was a match against the buffalo; and according to old hunting legends, even the grisly held back from attacking a beast in the prime of its power and sneaked in the wake of the roving herds, like the coyotes and timber-wolves, for the chance of hamstringing a calf, or breaking a young cow's neck, or tackling some poor old king worsted in battle and deposed from the leadership of the herd, or snapping up some lost buffalo staggering blind on the trail of a prairie fire. The buffalo, like the range cattle, had a quality that made for the persistence of the species. When attacked by a beast of prey, they would line up for defence, charge upon the assailant, and trample life out. Adaptability to environment, strength excelling all foes, wonderful sagacity against attack—these were factors that partly explained the vastness of the buffalo herds once roaming this continent.

Proofs enough remain to show that the size of the herds simply could not be exaggerated. In two great areas their multitude exceeded anything in the known world. These were: (1) between the Arkansas and the Missouri, fenced in, as it were, by the Mississippi and the Rockies; (2) between the Missouri and the Saskatchewan, bounded by the Rockies on the west and on the east, that depression where lie Lakes Winnipeg, Manitoba, and Winnipegoosis. In both regions the prairie is scarred by trails where the buffalo have marched single file to their watering-places—trails trampled by such a multitude of hoofs that the groove sinks to the depth of a rider's stirrup or the hub of a wagon-wheel.

At fording-places on the Qu'Appelle and Saskatchewan in Canada, and on the Upper Missouri, Yellowstone, and Arkansas in the Western States, carcasses of buffalo have been found where the stampeding herd trampled the weak under foot, virtually building a bridge of the dead over which the vast host rushed.

Then there were "the fairy rings," ruts like the water trail, only running in a perfect circle, with the hoofprints of countless multitudes in and outside the ring. Two explanations were given of these. When the calves were yet little, and the wild animals ravenous with spring hunger, the bucks and old leaders formed a cordon round the mothers and their young. The late Colonel Bedson of Stony Mountain, Manitoba, who had the finest private collection of buffalo in America until his death ten years ago, when the herd was shipped to Texas, observed another occasion when the buffalo formed a circle. Of an ordinary winter storm the herd took small notice except to turn backs to the wind; but if to a howling blizzard were added a biting north wind, with the thermometer forty degrees below zero, the buffalo lay down in a crescent as a wind-break to the young. Besides the "fairy rings" and the fording-places, evidences of the buffaloes' numbers are found at the salt-licks, alkali depressions on the prairie, soggy as paste in spring, dried hard as rock in midsummer and retaining footprints like a plaster cast; while at the wallows, where the buffalo have been taking mud-baths as a refuge from vermin and summer heat, the ground is scarred and ploughed as if for ramparts.

The comparison of the buffalo herds to the northland caribou has become almost commonplace; but it

is the sheerest nonsense. From Hearne, two hundred years ago, to Mr. Tyrrel or Mr. Whitney in the Barren Lands in 1894-'96, no mention is ever made of a caribou herd exceeding ten thousand. Few herds of one thousand have ever been seen.

What are the facts regarding the buffalo?

In the thirties, when the American Fur Company was in the heyday of its power, there were sent from St. Louis alone in a single year one hundred thousand robes. The company bought only the perfect robes. The hunter usually kept an ample supply for his own needs; so that for every robe bought by the company, three times as many were taken from the plains. St. Louis was only one port of shipment. Equal quantities of robes were being sent from Mackinaw, Detroit, Montreal, and Hudson Bay. A million would not cover the number of robes sent east each year in the thirties and forties. In 1868 Inman, Sheridan, and Custer rode continuously for three days through one herd in the Arkansas region. In 1869 trains on the Kansas Pacific were held from nine in the morning till six at night to permit the passage of one herd across the tracks. Army officers related that in 1862 a herd moved north from the Arkansas to the Yellowstone that covered an area of seventy by thirty miles. Catlin and Inman and army men and employees of the fur companies considered a drove of one hundred thousand buffalo a common sight along the line of the Santa Fé trail. Inman computes that from St. Louis alone the bones of thirty-one million buffalo were shipped between 1868 and 1881. Northward the testimony is the same. John MacDonell, a partner of the North-West Company, tells how at the beginning of the last century a

herd stamped across the ice of the Qu'Appelle valley. In some places the ice broke. When the thaw came, a continuous line of drowned buffalo drifted past the fur post for three days. Mr. MacDonell counted up to seven thousand three hundred and sixty: there his patience gave out. And the number of the drowned was only a fringe of the travelling herd.

To-day where are the buffalo? A few in the public parks of the United States and Canada. A few of Colonel Bedson's old herd on Lord Strathcona's farm in Manitoba and the rest on a ranch in Texas. The railway more than the pot-hunter was the power that exterminated the buffalo. The railway brought the settlers; and the settlers fenced in the great ranges where the buffalo could have galloped away from all the pot-hunters of earth combined. Without the railway the buffalo could have resisted the hunter as they resisted Indian hunters from time immemorial; but when the iron line cut athwart the continent the herds only stamped from one quarter to rush into the fresh dangers of another.

Much has been said about man's part in the destruction of the buffalo; and too much could not be said against those monomaniacs of slaughter who went into the buffalo-hunt from sheer love of killing, hiring the Indians to drive a herd over an embankment or into soft snow, while the valiant hunters sat in some sheltered spot, picking off the helpless quarry. This was not hunting. It was butchery, which none but hungry savages and white barbarians practised. The plainsman—who is the true type of the buffalo-runner—entered the lists on a fair field with the odds a hundred

to one against himself, and the only advantages over brute strength the dexterity of his own aim.

Man was the least cruel of the buffalo's foes. Far crueler havoc was worked by the prairie fire and the fights for supremacy in the leadership of the herd and the sleuths of the trail and the wild stampedes often started by nothing more than the shadow of a cloud on the prairie. Natural history tells of nothing sadder than a buffalo herd overtaken by a prairie fire. Flee as they might, the fiery hurricane was fleeter; and when the flame swept past, the buffalo were left staggering over blackened wastes, blind from the fire, singed of fur to the raw, and mad with a thirst they were helpless to quench.

In the fights for leadership of the herd old age went down before youth. Colonel Bedson's daughter has often told the writer of her sheer terror as a child when these battles took place among the buffalo. The first intimation of trouble was usually a boldness among the young fellows of maturing strength. On the rove for the first year or two of their existence these youngsters were hooked and butted back into place as a rear-guard; and woe to the fellow whose vanity tempted him within range of the leader's sharp, pruning-hook horns! Just as the wolf aimed for the throat or leg sinews of a victim, so the irate buffalo struck at the point most vulnerable to his sharp, curved horn—the soft flank where a quick rip meant torture and death.

Comes a day when the young fellows refuse to be hooked and hectored to the rear! Then one of the boldest braces himself, circling and guarding and wheeling and keeping his lowered horns in line with the head

of the older rival. That is the buffalo challenge! And there presently follows a bellowing like the rumbling of distant thunder, each keeping his eye on the other, circling and guarding and countering each other's moves, like fencers with foils. When one charges, the other wheels to meet the charge straight in front; and with a crash the horns are locked. It is then a contest of strength against strength, dexterity against dexterity. Not unusually the older brute goes into a fury from sheer amazement at the younger's presumption. His guarded charges become blind rushes, and he soon finds himself on the end of a pair of piercing horns. As soon as the rumbling and pawing began, Colonel Bedson used to send his herders out on the fleetest buffalo ponies to part the contestants; for, like the king of beasts that he is, the buffalo does not know how to surrender. He fights till he can fight no more; and if he is not killed, is likely to be mangled, a deposed king, whipped and broken-spirited and relegated to the fag-end of the trail, where he drags lamely after the subjects he once ruled.

Some day the barking of a prairie-dog, the rustle of a leaf, the shadow of a cloud, startles a giddy young cow. She throws up her head and is off. There is a stampede—myriad forms lumbering over the earth till the ground rocks and nothing remains of the buffalo herd but the smoking dust of the far horizon—nothing but the poor, old, deposed king, too weak to keep up the pace, feeble with fear, trembling at his own shadow, leaping in terror at a leaf blown by the wind.

After that the end is near, and the old buffalo must realize that fact as plainly as a human being would. Has he roamed the plains and guarded the calves from

sleuths of the trail and seen the devourers leap on a fallen comrade before death has come, and yet does not know what those vague, gray forms are, always hovering behind him, always sneaking to the crest of a hill when he hides in the valley, always skulking through the prairie grass when he goes to a lookout on the crest of the hill, always stopping when he stops, creeping closer when he lies down, scuttling when he wheels, snapping at his heels when he stoops for a drink? If the buffalo did not know what these creatures meant, he would not have spent his entire life from calfhood guarding against them. But he does know; and therein lies the tragedy of the old king's end. He invariably seeks out some steep background where he can take his last stand against the wolves with a face to the foe.

But the end is inevitable.

While the main pack baits him to the fore, skulkers dart to the rear; and when, after a struggle that lasts for days, his hind legs sink powerless under him, hamstrung by the snap of some vicious coyote, he still keeps his face to the foe. But in sheer horror of the tragedy the rest is untellable; for the hungry creatures that prey do not wait till death comes to the victim.

Poor old king! Is anything that man has ever done to the buffalo herd half as tragically pitiful as nature's process of deposing a buffalo leader?

Catlin and Inman and every traveller familiar with the great plains region between the Arkansas and Saskatchewan testify that the quick death of the bullet was, indeed, the mercy stroke compared to nature's end of her wild creatures. In Colonel Bedson's herd the fighters were always parted before either was disabled;

but it was always at the sacrifice of two or three ponies' lives.

In the park specimens of buffalo a curious deterioration is apparent. On Lord Strathcona's farm in Manitoba, where the buffalo still have several hundred acres of ranging-ground and are nearer to their wild state than elsewhere, they still retain their leonine splendour of strength in shoulders and head; but at Banff only the older ones have this appearance, the younger generation, like those of the various city parks, gradually assuming more dwarfed proportions about the shoulders, with a suggestion of a big, round-headed, clumsy sheep.

Between the Arkansas and the Saskatchewan buffalo were always plentiful enough for an amateur's hunt; but the trapper of the plains, to whom the hunt meant food and clothing and a roof for the coming year, favoured two seasons: (1) the end of June, when he had brought in his packs to the fur post and the winter's trapping was over and the fort full of idle hunters keen for the excitement of the chase; (2) in midwinter, when that curious lull came over animal life, before the autumn stores had been exhausted and before the spring forage began.

In both seasons the buffalo-robés were prime: sleek and glossy in June before the shedding of the fleece, with the fur at its greatest length; fresh and clean and thick in midwinter. But in midwinter the hunters were scattered, the herds broken in small battalions, the climate perilous for a lonely man who might be tempted to track fleeing herds many miles from a known course. South of the Yellowstone the individual

hunter pursued the buffalo as he pursued deer—by still-hunting; for though the buffalo was keen of scent, he was dull of sight, except sideways on the level, and was not easily disturbed by a noise as long as he did not see its cause.

Behind the shelter of a mound and to leeward of the herd the trapper might succeed in bringing down what would be a creditable showing in a moose or deer hunt; but the trapper was hunting buffalo for their robes. Two or three robes were not enough from a large herd; and before he could get more there was likely to be a stampede. Decoy work was too slow for the trapper who was buffalo-hunting. So was tracking on snow-shoes, the way the Indians hunted north of the Yellowstone. A wounded buffalo at close range was quite as vicious as a wounded grisly; and it did not pay the trapper to risk his life getting a pelt for which the trader would give him only four or five dollars' worth of goods.

The Indians hunted buffalo by driving them over a precipice where hunters were stationed on each side below, or by luring the herd into a pound or pit by means of an Indian decoy masking under a buffalo-hide. But the precipice and pit destroyed too many hides; and if the pound were a sort of *cheval-de-frise* or corral converging at the inner end, it required more hunters than were ever together except at the incoming of the spring brigades.

When there were many hunters and countless buffalo, the white blood of the plains' trapper preferred a fair fight in an open field—not the indiscriminate carnage of the Indian hunt; so that the greatest buffalo-runs took place after the opening of spring. The

greatest of these were on the Upper Missouri. This was the Mandan country, where hunters of the Mackinaw from Michilimackinac, of the Missouri from St. Louis, of the Nor' Westers from Montreal, of the Hudson Bay from Fort Douglas (Winnipeg), used to congregate before the War of 1812, which barred out Canadian traders.

At a later date the famous, loud-screeching Red River ox-carts were used to transport supplies to the scene of the hunt; but at the opening of the last century all hunters, whites, Indians, and squaws, rode to field on cayuse ponies or broncos, with no more supplies than could be stowed away in a saddle-pack, and no other escort than the old-fashioned muskets over each white man's shoulder or attached to his holster.

The Indians were armed with bow and arrow only. The course usually led north and westward, for the reason that at this season the herds were on their great migrations north, and the course of the rivers headed them westward. From the first day out the hunter best fitted for the captainship was recognised as leader, and such discipline maintained as prevented unruly spirits stampeding the buffalo before the cavalcade had closed near enough for the wild rush.

At night the hunters slept under open sky with horses picketed to saddles, saddles as pillows, and musket in hand. When the course led through the country of hostiles, sentinels kept guard; but midnight usually saw all hunters in the deep sleep of outdoor life, bare faces upturned to the stars, a little tenuous stream of uprising smoke where the camp-fire still glowed red, and on the far, shadowy horizon, with the moonlit sky-line meeting the billowing prairie in perfect circle,

vague, whitish forms—the coyotes keeping watch, stealthy and shunless as death.

The northward movement of the buffalo began with the spring. Odd scattered herds might have roamed the valleys in the winter; but as the grass grew deeper and lush with spring rains, the reaches of the prairie land became literally covered with the humpback, furry forms of the roving herds. Indian legend ascribed their coming directly to the spirits. The more prosaic white man explained that the buffalo were only emerging from winter shelter, and their migration was a search for fresh feeding-ground.

Be that as it may, northward they came, in straggling herds that covered the prairie like a flock of locusts; in close-formed battalions, with leaders and scouts and flank guards protecting the cows and the young; in long lines, single file, leaving the ground, soft from spring rains, marked with a rut like a ditch; in a mad stampede at a lumbering gallop that roared like an ocean tide up hills and down steep ravines, sure-footed as a mountain-goat, thrashing through the swollen water-course of river and slough, up embankments with long beards and fringed dewlaps dripping—on and on and on—till the tidal wave of life had hulked over the sky-line beyond the heaving horizon. Here and there in the brownish-black mass were white and gray forms, light-coloured buffalo, freaks in the animal world.

The age of the calves in each year's herd varied. The writer remembers a sturdy little buffalo that arrived on the scene of this troubrous life one freezing night in January, with a howling blizzard and the thermometer at forty below—a combination that is suffi-

cient to set the teeth of the most mendacious northerner chattering. The young buffalo spent the first three days of his life in this gale and was none the worse, which seems to prove that climatic apology, "though it is cold, you don't feel it." Another spindly-legged, clumsy bundle of fawn and fur in the same herd counted its natal day from a sweltering afternoon in August.

Many signs told the buffalo-runners which way to ride for the herd. There was the trail to the watering-place. There were the salt-licks and the wallows and the crushed grass where two young fellows had been smashing each other's horns in a trial of strength. There were the bones of the poor old deposed king, picked clear by the coyotes, or, perhaps, the lonely outcast himself, standing at bay, feeble and frightened, a picture of dumb woe! To such the hunter's shot was a mercy stroke. Or, most interesting of all signs and surest proof that the herd was near—a little bundle of fawn-coloured fur lying out flat as a door-mat under hiding of sage-brush, or against a clay mound, precisely the colour of its own hide.

Poke it! An ear blinks, or a big ox-like eye opens! It is a buffalo calf left cached by the mother, who has gone to the watering-place or is pasturing with the drove. Lift it up! It is inert as a sack of wool. Let it go! It drops to earth flat and lifeless as a door-mat. The mother has told it how to escape the coyotes and wolverines; and the little rascal is "playing dead." But if you fondle it and warm it—the Indians say, breathe into its face—it forgets all about the mother's warning and follows like a pup.

At the first signs of the herd's proximity the squaws

parted from the cavalcade and all impedimenta remained behind. The best-equipped man was the man with the best horse, a horse that picked out the largest buffalo from one touch of the rider's hand or foot, that galloped swift as wind in pursuit, that jerked to a stop directly opposite the brute's shoulders and leaped from the sideward sweep of the charging horns. No sound came from the hunters till all were within close range. Then the captain gave the signal, dropped a flag, waved his hand, or fired a shot, and the hunters charged.

Arrows whistled through the air, shots clattered with the fusillade of artillery volleys. Bullets fell to earth with the dull ping of an aim glanced aside by the adamant head bones or the heaving shoulder fur of the buffalo. The Indians shouted their war-cry of "Ah—oh, ah—oh!" Here and there French voices screamed "Voilà! Les bœufs! Les bœufs! Satré! Tonnerre! Tir—tir—tir—done! By Gar!" And Missouri traders called out plain and less picturesque but more forcible English.

Sometimes the suddenness of the attack dazed the herd; but the second volley with the smell of powder and smoke and men started the stampede. Then followed such a wild rush as is unknown in the annals of any other kind of hunting, up hills, down embankments, over cliffs, through sloughs, across rivers, hard and fast and far as horses had strength to carry riders in a boundless land!

Riders were unseated and went down in the *mêlée*; horses caught on the horns of charging bulls and ripped from shoulder to flank; men thrown high in mid-air to alight on the back of a buffalo; Indians with dexterous aim bringing down the great brutes with one arrow; un-



The buffalo-hunt.

After a contemporary print.



wary hunters trampled to death under a multitude of hoofs; wounded buffalo turning with fury on their assailants till the pursuer became pursued and only the fleetness of the pony saved the hunter's life.

A retired officer of the North-West mounted police, who took part in a Missouri buffalo-run forty years ago, described the impression at the time as of an earthquake. The galloping horses, the rocking mass of fleeing buffalo, the rumbling and quaking of the ground under the thunderous pounding, were all like a violent earthquake. The same gentleman tells how he once saw a wounded buffalo turn on an Indian hunter. The man's horse took fright. Instead of darting sideways to give him a chance to send a last finishing shot home, the horse became wildly unmanageable and fled. The buffalo pursued. Off they raced, rider and buffalo, the Indian craning over his horse's neck, the horse blown and fagged and unable to gain one pace ahead of the buffalo, the great beast covered with foam, his eyes like fire, pounding and pounding—closer and closer to the horse till rider and buffalo disappeared over the horizon.

"To this day I have wondered what became of that Indian," said the officer, "for the horse was losing and the buffalo gaining when they went over the bluff."

The incident illustrates a trait seldom found in wild animals—a persistent vindictiveness.

In a word, buffalo-hunting was not all boys' play.

After the hunt came the gathering of skins and meat. The tongue was first taken as a delicacy for the great feast that celebrated every buffalo-hunt. To this was sometimes added the fleece fat or hump. White hunters have been accused of waste, because they used

only the skin, tongue, and hump of the buffalo. But what the white hunter left the Indian took, making pemmican by pounding the meat with tallow, drying thinly-shaved slices into " jerked " meat, getting thread from the buffalo sinews and implements of the chase from the bones.

The gathering of the spoils was not the least dangerous part of the buffalo-hunt. Many an apparently lifeless buffalo has lunged up in a death-throe that has cost the hunter dear. The mounted police officer of whom mention has been made was once camping with a patrol party along the international line between Idaho and Canada. Among the hunting stories told over the camp-fire was that of the Indian pursued by the wounded buffalo. Scarcely had the colonel finished his anecdote when a great hulking buffalo rose to the crest of a hillock not a gunshot away.

" Come on, men! Let us all have a shot," cried the colonel, grasping his rifle.

The buffalo dropped at the first rifle-crack, and the men scrambled pell-mell up the hill to see whose bullet had struck vital. Just as they stooped over the fallen buffalo it lunged up with an angry snort.

The story of the pursued Indian was still fresh in all minds. The colonel is the only man of the party honest enough to tell what happened next. He declares if breath had not given out every man would have run till he dropped over the horizon, like the Indian and the buffalo.

And when they plucked up courage to go back, the buffalo was dead as a stone.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MOUNTAINEERS

IT was in the Rocky Mountains that American trapping attained its climax of heroism and dauntless daring and knavery that out-herods comparison.

The War of 1812 had demoralized the American fur trade. Indians from both sides of the international boundary committed every depredation, and evaded punishment by scampering across the line to the protection of another flag. Alexander MacKenzie of the North-West Company had been the first of the Canadian traders to cross the Rockies, reaching the Pacific in 1793. The result was that in less than fifteen years the fur posts of the North-West and Hudson's Bay Companies were dotted like beads on a rosary down the course of the mountain rivers to the boundary. Of the American traders, the first to follow up Lewis and Clark's lead from the Missouri to the Columbia were Manuel Lisa the Spaniard and Major Andrew Henry, the two leading spirits of the Missouri Company. John Jacob Astor sent his Astorians of the Pacific Company across the continent in 1811, and a host of St. Louis firms had prepared to send free trappers to the mountains when the war broke out. The end of the war saw 'Astoria captured by the Nor' Westers, the Astorians scattered to all parts of the world, Lisa driven down

the Missouri to Counceil Bluffs, Andrew Henry a fugitive from the Blackfeet of the Yellowstone, and all the free trappers like an idle army waiting for a captain.

Their captain came.

Mr. Astor's influence secured the passage of a law barring out British fur traders from the United States. That threw all the old Hudson's Bay and North-West posts south of the boundary into the hands of Mr. Astor's American Fur Company. He had already bought out the American part of the Mackinaw Company's posts, stretching west from Michilimackinac beyond the Mississippi towards the head waters of the Missouri. And now to his force came a tremendous accession—all those dissatisfied Nor' Westers thrown out of employment when their company amalgamated with the Hudson's Bay.

If Mr. Astor alone had held the American fur trade, there would have been none of that rivalry which ended in so much bloodshed. But St. Louis, lying like a gateway to the mountain trade, had always been jealous of those fur traders with headquarters in New York. Lisa had refused to join Mr. Astor's Pacific Company, and doubtless the Spaniard chuckled over his own wisdom when that venture failed with a loss of nearly half a million to its founder. When Lisa died the St. Louis traders still held back from the American Fur Company. Henry and Ashley and the Sublettes and Campbell and Fitzpatrick and Bridger—subsequently known as the Rocky Mountain traders—swept up the Missouri with brigades of one hundred, two hundred, and three hundred men, and were overrunning the mountains five years before the American Company's slowly extending line of forts had reached as far west as the

Yellowstone. A clash was bound to ensue when these two sets of rivals met on a hunting-field which the Rocky Mountain men regarded as pre-empted by themselves.

The clash came from the peculiarities of the hunting-ground.

It was two thousand miles by trappers' trail from the reach of law. It was too remote from the fur posts for trappers to go down annually for supplies. Supplies were sent up by the fur companies to a mountain *rendezvous*, to Pierre's Hole under the Tetons, or Jackson's Hole farther east, or Ogden's Hole at Salt Lake, sheltered valleys with plenty of water for men and horses when hunters and traders and Indians met at the annual camp.

Elsewhere the hunter had only to follow the windings of a river to be carried to his hunting-ground. Here, streams were too turbulent for canoes; and boats were abandoned for horses; and mountain cañons with sides sheer as a wall drove the trapper back from the river-bed to interminable forests, where windfall and underbrush and rockslide obstructed every foot of progress. The valley might be shut in by a blind wall which cooped the hunter up where was neither game nor food. Out of this valley, then, he must find a way for himself and his horses, noting every peak so that he might know this region again, noting especially the peaks with the black rock walls; for where the rock is black snow has not clung, and the mountain face will not change; and where snow cannot stick, a man cannot climb; and the peak is a good one for the trapper to shun.

One, two, three seasons have often slipped away be-

fore the mountaineers found good hunting-ground. Ten years is a short enough time to learn the lie of the land in even a small section of mountains. It was twenty years from the time Lewis and Clark first crossed the mountains before the traders of St. Louis could be sure that the trappers sent into the Rockies would find their way out. Seventy lives were lost in the first two years of mountain trapping, some at the hands of the hostile Blackfeet guarding the entrance to the mountains at the head waters of the Missouri, some at the hands of the Snakes on the Upper Columbia, others between the Platte and Salt Lake. Time and money and life it cost to learn the hunting-grounds of the Rockies; and the mountaineers would not see knowledge won at such a cost wrested away by a spying rival.

Then, too, the mountains had bred a new type of trapper, a new style of trapping.

Only the most daring hunters would sign contracts for the "Up-Country," or *Pays d'en Haut* as the French called it. The French trappers, for the most part, kept to the river valleys and plains; and if one went to the mountains for a term of years, when he came out he was no longer the smug, indolent, laughing, chattering *voyageur*. The great silences of a life hard as the iron age had worked a change. To begin with, the man had become a horseman, a climber, a scout, a fighter of Indians and elements, lank and thin and lithe, silent and dogged and relentless.

In other regions hunters could go out safely in pairs or even alone, carrying supplies enough for the season in a canoe, and drifting down-stream with a

canoe-load of pelts to the fur post. But the mountains were so distant and inaccessible, great quantities of supplies had to be taken. That meant long cavalcades of pack-horses, which Blackfeet were ever on the alert to stampede. Armed guards had to accompany the pack-train. Out of a party of a hundred trappers sent to the mountains by the Rock Mountain Company, thirty were always crack rifle-shots for the protection of the company's property. One such party, properly officered and kept from crossing the animal's tracks, might not drive game from a valley. Two such bands of rival traders keen to pilfer each other's traps would result in ruin to both.

That is the way the clash came in the early thirties of the last century.

All winter bands of Rocky Mountain trappers under Fitzpatrick and Bridger and Sublette had been sweeping, two hundred strong, like foraging bandits, from the head waters of the Missouri, where was one mountain pass to the head waters of the Platte, where was a second pass much used by the mountaineers. Summer came with the heat that wakens all the mountain silences to a roar of rampant life. Summer came with the fresh-loosened rocks clattering down the mountain slopes in a landslide, and the avalanches booming over the precipices in a Niagara of snow, and the swollen torrents shouting to each other in a thousand voices till the valleys vibrated to that grandest of all music—the voice of many waters. Summer came with the heat that drives the game up to the cool heights of the wind-swept peaks; and the hunters of the game began retracing their way from valley to

valley, gathering the furs cached during the winter hunt.

Then the cavalcade set out for the *rendezvous*: grizzled men in tattered buckskins, with long hair and unkempt beards and bronzed skin, men who rode as if they were part of the saddle, easy and careless but always with eyes alert and one hand near the thing in their holsters; long lines of pack-horses laden with furs climbing the mountains in a zigzag trail like a spiral stair, crawling along the face of cliffs barely wide enough to give a horse footing, skirting the sky-line between lofty peaks in order to avoid the detour round the broadened bases, frequently swimming raging torrents whose force carried them half a mile off their trail; always following the long slopes, for the long slopes were most easily climbed; seldom following a water-course, for mountain torrents take short cuts over precipices; packers scattering to right and left at the fording-places, to be rounded back by the collie-dog and the shouting drivers, and the old bell-mare darting after the bolters with her ears laid flat.

Not a sign by the way escaped the mountaineer's eye. Here the tumbling torrent is clear and sparkling and cold as champagne. He knows that stream comes from snow. A glacial stream would be milky blue or milky green from glacial silts; and while game seeks the cool heights in summer, the animals prefer the snow-line and avoid the chill of the iced masses in a glacier. There will be game coming down from the source of that stream when he passes back this way in the fall. Ah! what is that little indurated line running up the side of the cliff—just a displacement of the rock chips here, a hardening of the earth that winds

in and out among the devil's-club and painter's-brush and mountain laurel and rock crop and heather?

"Something has been going up and down here to a drinking-place," says the mountaineer.

Punky yellow logs lie ripped open and scratched where bruin has been enjoying a dainty morsel of ants' eggs; but the bear did not make that track. It is too dainty, and has been used too regularly. Neither has the bighorn made it; for the mountain-sheep seldom stay longer above tree-line, resting in the high, meadowed Alpine valleys with the long grasses and sunny reaches and larch shade.

Presently the belled leader tinkles her way round an elbow of rock where a stream trickles down. This is the drinking-place. In the soft mould is a little cleft footprint like the ace of hearts, the trail of the mountain-goat feeding far up at the snow-line where the stream rises.

Then the little cleft mark unlocks a world of hunter's yarns: how at such a ledge, where the cataract falls like wind-blown mist, one trapper saw a mother goat teaching her little kid to take the leap, and how when she scented human presence she went jump—jump—jump—up and up and up the rock wall, where the man could not follow, bleating and calling the kid; and how the kid leaped and fell back and leaped, and cried as pitifully as a child, till the man, having no canned milk to bring it up, out of very sympathy went away.

Then another tells how he tried to shoot a goat running up a gulch, but as fast as he sighted his rifle—"drew the bead"—the thing jumped from side to side, criss-crossing up the gulch till she got above dan-

ger and away. And some taciturn oracle comes out with the dictum that "men hadn't ought to try to shoot goat except from above or in front."

Every pack-horse of the mountains knows the trick of planting legs like stanchions and blowing his sides out in a balloon when the men are tightening cinches. No matter how tight girths may be, before every climb and at the foot of every slope there must be re-tightening. And at every stop the horses come shouldering up for the packs to be righted, or try to scrape the things off under some low-branched tree.

Night falls swiftly in the mountains, the long, peaked shadows etching themselves across the valleys. Shafts of sunlight slant through the mountain gaps gold against the endless reaches of matted forest, red as wine across the snowy heights. With the purpling shadows comes a sudden chill, silencing the roar of mountain torrents to an all-pervading ceaseless prolonged h—u—s—h—!

Mountaineers take no chances on the ledges after dark. It is dangerous enough work to skirt narrow precipices in daylight; and sunset is often followed by a thick mist rolling across the heights in billows of fog. These are the clouds that one sees across the peaks at nightfall like banners. How does it feel benighted among those clouds?

A few years ago I was saving a long detour round the base of a mountain by riding along the saddle of rock between two peaks. The sky-line rounded the convex edge of a sheer precipice for three miles. Midway the inner wall rose straight, the outer edge above blackness—seven thousand feet the mountaineer guiding us said it was, though I think it was nearer

five. The guide's horse displaced a stone the size of a pail from the path. If a man had slipped in the same way he would have fallen to the depths; but when one foot slips, a horse has three others to regain himself; and with a rear-end flounder the horse got his footing. But down—down—down went the stone, bouncing and knocking and echoing as it struck against the precipice wall—down—down—down till it was no larger than a spool—then out of sight—and silence! The mountaineer looked back over his shoulder.

"Always throw both your feet over the saddle to the inner side of the trail in a place like this," he directed, with a curious meaning in his words.

"What do you do when the clouds catch you on this sort of a ledge?"

"Get off—knock ahead with your rifle to feel where the edge is—throw bits of rock through the fog so you can tell where you are by the sound."

"And when no sound comes back?"

"Sit still," said he. Then to add emphasis, "You bet you sit still! People can say what they like, but when no sound comes back, or when the sound's muffled as if it came from water below, you bet it gives you chills!"

So the mountaineers take no chances on the ledges after dark. The moon riding among the peaks rises over pack-horses standing hobbled on the lee side of a roaring camp-fire that will drive the sand-flies and mosquitoes away, on pelts and saddle-trees piled carefully together, on men sleeping with no pillow but a pack, no covering but the sky.

If a sharp crash breaks the awful stillness of a

mountain night, the trapper is unalarmed. He knows it is only some great rock loosened by the day's thaw rolling down with a landslide. If a shrill, fiendish laugh shrieks through the dark, he pays no heed. It is only the cougar prowling cattishly through the under-brush perhaps still-hunting the hunter. The lonely call overhead is not the prairie-hawk, but the eagle lilting and wheeling in a sort of dreary enjoyment of utter loneliness.

Long before the sunrise has drawn the tented shadows across the valley the mountaineers are astir, with the pack-horses snatching mouthfuls of bunch-grass as they travel off in a way that sets the old leader's bell tinkling.

The mountaineers usually left their hunting-grounds early in May. They seldom reached their *rendezvous* before July or August. Three months travelling a thousand miles! Three hundred miles a month! Ten miles a day! It is not a record that shows well beside our modern sixty miles an hour—a thousand miles a day. And yet it is a better record; for if our latter-day fliers had to build the road as they went along, they would make slower time than the mountaineers of a century ago.

Rivers too swift to swim were rafted on pine logs, cut and braced together while the cavalcade waited. Muskegs where the industrious little beaver had flooded a valley by damming up the central stream often mired the horses till all hands were called to haul out the unfortunate; and where the mire was very treacherous and the surrounding mountains too steep for foothold, choppers went to work and corduroyed a trail across, throwing the logs on branches that kept them

afloat, and overlaying with moss to save the horses' feet.

But the greatest cause of delay was the windfall, pines and spruce of enormous girth pitched down by landslide and storm into an impassable *cheval-de-frise*. Turn to the right! A matted tangle of underbrush higher than the horses' head bars the way! Turn to the left! A muskeg where horses sink through quaking moss to saddle-girths! If the horses could not be driven around the barrier, the mountaineers would try to force a high jump. The high jump failing except at risk of broken legs, there was nothing to do but chop a passage through.

And were the men carving a way through the wilderness only the bushwhackers who have pioneered other forest lands? Of the prominent men leading mountaineers in 1831, Vanderburgh of the American Fur Company was a son of a Fifth New York Regiment officer in the Revolutionary War, and himself a graduate of West Point. One of the Rocky Mountain leaders was a graduate from a blacksmith-shop. Another leader was a descendant of the royal blood of France. All grades of life supplied material for the mountaineer; but it was the mountains that bred the heroism, that created a new type of trapper—the most purely American type, because produced by purely American conditions.

Green River was the *rendezvous* for the mountaineers in 1831; and to Green River came trappers of the Columbia, of the Three Forks, of the Missouri, of the Bighorn and Yellowstone and Platte. From St. Louis came the traders to exchange supplies for pelts; and from every habitable valley of the mountains native

tribes to barter furs, sell horses for transport, carouse at the merry meeting and spy on what the white hunters were doing. For a month all was the confusion of a gipsy camp or Oriental fair.

French-Canadian *voyageurs* who had come up to raft the season's cargo down-stream to St. Louis jostled shoulders with mountaineers from the Spanish settlements to the south and American trappers from the Columbia to the north and free trappers who had ranged every forest of America from Labrador to Mexico.* Merchants from St. Louis, like General Ashley, the foremost leader of Rocky Mountain trappers, descendants from Scottish nobility like Kenneth MacKenzie of Fort Union, miscellaneous gentlemen of adventure like Captain Bonneville, or Wyeth of Boston, or Baron Stuart—all with retinues of followers like mediæval lords—found themselves hobnobbing at the *rendezvous* with mighty Indian sachems, Crows or Pend d'Oreilles or Flat Heads, clad in little else than moccasins, a buffalo-skin blanket, and a pompous dignity.

Among the underlings was a time of wild revel, drinking daylight out and daylight in, decking themselves in tawdry finery for the one dress occasion of the year, and gambling sober or drunk till all the season's earnings, pelts and clothing and horses and traps, were gone.

The partners—as the Rocky Mountain men called themselves in distinction to the *bourgeois* of the French, the factors of the Hudson's Bay, the partisans of the

* This is no exaggeration. Smith's trappers, who were scattered from Fort Vancouver to Monterey, the Astorians, Major Andrew Henry's party—had all been such wide-ranging foresters.

American Fur Company—held confabs over crumpled maps, planning the next season's hunt, drawing in roughly the fresh information brought down each year of new regions, and plotting out all sections of the mountains for the different brigades.

This year a new set of faces appeared at the *rendezvous*, from thirty to fifty men with full quota of saddle-horses, pack-mules, and traps. On the traps were letters that afterward became magical in all the Up-Country—A. F. C.—American Fur Company. Leading these men were Vanderburgh, who had already become a successful trader among the Aricaras and had to his credit one victory over the Blackfeet; and Drips, who had been a member of the old Missouri Fur Company and knew the Upper Platte well. But the Rocky Mountain men, who knew the cost of life and time and money it had taken to learn the hunting-grounds of the Rockies, doubtless smiled at these tenderfeet who thought to trap as successfully in the hills as they had on the plains.

Two things counselled caution. Vanderburgh would stop at nothing. Drips had married a native woman of the Platte, whose tribe might know the hunting-grounds as well as the mountaineers. Hunters fraternize in friendship at holidaying; but they no more tell each other secrets than rival editors at a banquet. Mountaineers knowing the field like Bridger who had been to the Columbia with Henry as early as 1822 and had swept over the ranges as far south as the Platte, or Fitzpatrick * who had made the Salt Lake region

* Fitzpatrick was late in reaching the hunting-ground this year, owing to a disaster with Smith on the way back from Santa Fé.

his stamping-ground, might smile at the newcomers; but they took good care to give their rivals the slip when hunters left the *rendezvous* for the hills.

When the mountaineers scattered, Fitzpatrick led his brigade to the region between the Black Hills on the east and the Bighorn Mountains on the west. The first snowfall was powdering the hills. Beaver were beginning to house up for the winter. Big game was moving down to the valley. The hunters had pitched a central camp on the banks of Powder River, gathered in the supply of winter meat, and dispersed in pairs to trap all through the valley.

But forest rangers like Vanderburgh and Drips were not to be so easily foiled. Every axe-mark on windfall, every camp-fire, every footprint in the spongy mould, told which way the mountaineers had gone. Fitzpatrick's hunters wakened one morning to find traps marked A. F. C. beside their own in the valley. The trick was too plain to be misunderstood. The American Fur Company might not know the hunting-grounds of the Rockies, but they were deliberately dogging the mountaineers to their secret retreats.

Armed conflict would only bring ruin in lawsuits.

Gathering his hunters together under cover of snowfall or night, Fitzpatrick broke camp, slipped stealthily out of the valley, over the Bighorn range, across the Bighorn River, now almost impassable in winter, into the pathless foldings of the Wind River Mountains, with their rampart walls and endless snow-fields, westward to Snake River Valley, three hundred miles away from the spies. Instead of trapping from east to west, as he had intended to do so that the return to the *rendezvous* would lead past the caches,

Fitzpatrick thought to baffle the spies by trapping from west to east.

Having wintered on the Snake, he moved gradually up-stream. Crossing southward over a divide, they unexpectedly came on the very rivals whom they were avoiding, Vanderburgh and Drips, evidently working northward on the mountaineers' trail. By a quick reverse they swept back north in time for the summer *rendezvous* at Pierre's Hole.

Who had told Vanderburgh and Drips that the mountaineers were to meet at Pierre's Hole in 1832? Possibly Indians and fur trappers who had been notified to come down to Pierre's Hole by the Rocky Mountain men; possibly, too, paid spies in the employment of the American Fur Company.

Before supplies had come up from St. Louis for the mountaineers Vanderburgh and Drips were at the *rendezvous*. Neither of the rivals could flee away to the mountains till the supplies came. Could the mountaineers but get away first, Vanderburgh and Drips could no longer dog a fresh trail. Fitzpatrick at once set out with all speed to hasten the coming convoy. Four hundred miles eastward he met the supplies, explained the need to hasten provisions, and with one swift horse under him and another swift one as a relay, galloped back to the *rendezvous*.

But the Blackfeet were ever on guard at the mountain passes like cats at a mouse-hole. Fitzpatrick had ridden into a band of hostiles before he knew the danger. Vaulting to the saddle of the fresh horse, he fled to the hills, where he lay concealed for three days. Then he ventured out. The Indians still guarded the passes. They must have come upon him at a night

camp when his horse was picketed, for Fitzpatrick escaped to the defiles of the mountains with nothing but the clothes on his back and a single ball in his rifle. By creeping from shelter to shelter of rugged declivities where the Indian ponies could not follow, he at last got across the divide, living wholly on roots and berries. Swimming one of the swollen mountain rivers, he lost his rifle. Hatless—for his hat had been cut up to bind his bleeding feet and protect them from the rocks—and starving, he at last fell in with some Iroquois hunters also bound for the *rendezvous*.

The convoy under Sublette had already arrived at Pierre's Hole.

The famous battle between white men and hostile Blackfeet at Pierre's Hole, which is told elsewhere, does not concern the story of rivalry between mountaineers and the American Fur Company. The Rocky Mountain men now realized that the magical A. F. C. was a rival to be feared and not to be lightly shaken. Some overtures were made by the mountaineers for an equal division of the hunting-ground between the two great companies. These Vanderburgh and Drips rejected with the scorn of utter confidence. Meanwhile provisions had not come for the American Fur Company. The mountaineers not only captured all trade with the friendly Indians, but in spite of the delay from the fight with the Blackfeet got away to their hunting-grounds two weeks in advance of the American Company.

What the Rocky Mountain men decided when the American Company rejected the offer to divide the hunting-ground can only be inferred from what was done.

Vanderburgh and Drips knew that Fitzpatrick and Bridger had led a picked body of horsemen northward from Pierre's Hole.

If the mountaineers had gone east of the lofty Tetons, their hunting-ground would be somewhere between the Yellowstone and the Bighorn. If they had gone south, one could guess they would round up somewhere about Salt Lake where the Hudson's Bay * had been so often " relieved " of their furs by the mountaineers. If they had gone west, their destination must be on the Columbia or the Snake. If they went north, they would trap on the Three Forks of the Upper Missouri.

Therefore Vanderburgh and Drips cached all impedimenta that might hamper swift marching, smiled to themselves, and headed their horses for the Three Forks of the Missouri.

There were Blackfeet, to be sure, in that region; and Blackfeet hated Vanderburgh with deadly venom because he had once defeated them and slain a great warrior. Also, the Blackfeet were smarting from the fearful losses of Pierre's Hole.

But if the Rocky Mountain men could go unscathed among the Blackfeet, why, so could the American Fur Company!

And Vanderburgh and Drips went!

Rival traders might not commit murder. That led to the fearful ruin of the lawsuits that overtook Nor'

* By law the Hudson's Bay had no right in this region from the passing of the act forbidding British traders in the United States. But, then, no man had a right to steal half a million of another's furs, which was the record of the Rocky Mountain men.

Westers and Hudson's Bay in Canada only fifteen years before.

But the mountaineers knew that the Blackfeet hated Henry Vanderburgh!

Corduroyed muskeg where the mountaineers' long file of pack-horses had passed, fresh-chopped logs to make a way through blockades of fallen pine, the green moss that hangs festooned among the spruce at cloud-line broken and swinging free as if a rider had passed that way, grazed bark where the pack-saddle had brushed a tree-trunk, muddy hoof-marks where the young packers had balked at fording an icy stream, scratchings on rotten logs where a mountaineer's pegged boot had stepped—all these told which way Fitzpatrick and Bridger had led their brigade.

Oh, it was an easy matter to scent so hot a trail! Here the ashes of a camp-fire! There a pile of rock placed a deal too carefully for nature's work—the cached furs of the fleeing rivals! Besides, what with cañon and whirlpool, there are so very few ways by which a cavalcade can pass through mountains that the simplest novice could have trailed Fitzpatrick and Bridger.

Doubtless between the middle of August when Vanderburgh and Drips set out on the chase and the middle of September when they ran down the fugitives the American Fur Company leaders had many a laugh at their own cleverness.

They succeeded in overtaking the mountaineers in the valley of the Jefferson, splendid hunting-grounds with game enough for two lines of traps, which Vanderburgh and Drips at once set out. No swift flight by forced marches this time! The mountaineers sat

still for almost a week. Then they casually moved down the Jefferson towards the main Missouri.

The hunting-ground was still good. Weren't the mountaineers leaving a trifle too soon? Should the Americans follow or stay? Vanderburgh remained, moving over into the adjacent valley and spreading his traps along the Madison. Drips followed the mountaineers.

Two weeks' chase over utterly gameless ground probably suggested to Drips that even an animal will lead off on a false scent to draw the enemy away from the true trail. At the Missouri he turned back up the Jefferson.

Wheeling right about, the mountaineers at once turned back too, up the farthest valley, the Gallatin, then on the way to the first hunting-ground westward over a divide to the Madison, where—ill luck!—they again met their ubiquitous rival, Vanderburgh!

How Vanderburgh laughed at these antics one may guess!

Post-haste up the Madison went the mountaineers!

Should Vanderburgh stay or follow? Certainly the enemy had been bound back for the good hunting-grounds when they had turned to retrace their way up the Madison. If they meant to try the Jefferson, Vanderburgh would forestall the move. He crossed over to the valley where he had first found them.

Sure enough there were camp-fires on the old hunting-grounds, a dead buffalo, from which the hunters had just fled to avoid Vanderburgh! If Vanderburgh laughed, his laugh was short; for there were signs that the buffalo had been slain by an Indian.

The trappers refused to hunt where there were

Blackfeet about. Vanderburgh refused to believe there was any danger of Blackfeet. Calling for volunteers, he rode forward with six men.

First they found a fire. The marauders must be very near. Then a dead buffalo was seen, then fresh tracks, unmistakably the tracks of Indians. But buffalo were pasturing all around undisturbed. There could not be many Indians.

Determined to quiet the fears of his men, Vanderburgh pushed on, entered a heavily wooded gulch, paused at the steep bank of a dried torrent, despaired nothing, and jumped his horse across the bank, followed by the six volunteers.

Instantly the valley rang with rifle-shots. A hundred hostiles sprang from ambush. Vanderburgh's horse went down. Three others cleared the ditch at a bound and fled; but Vanderburgh was to his feet, aiming his gun, and coolly calling out: "Don't run! Don't run!" Two men sent their horses back over the ditch to his call, a third was thrown to be slain on the spot, and Vanderburgh's first shot had killed the nearest Indian, when another volley from the Blackfeet exacted deadly vengeance for the warrior Vanderburgh had slain years before.

Panic-stricken riders carried the news to the waiting brigade. Refuge was taken in the woods, where sentinels kept guard all night. The next morning, with scouts to the fore, the brigade retreated cautiously towards some of their caches. A second night was passed behind barriers of logs; and the third day a band of friendly Indians was encountered, who were sent to bury the dead.

The Frenchman they buried. Vanderburgh had

been torn to pieces and his bones thrown into the river.

So ended the merry game of spying on the mountaineers.

As for the mountaineers, they fell into the meshes of their own snares; for on the way to Snake River, when parleying with friendly Blackfeet, the accidental discharge of Bridger's gun brought a volley of arrows from the Indians, one hooked barb lodging in Bridger's shoulder-blade, which he carried around for three years as a memento of his own trickery.

Fitzpatrick fared as badly. Instigated by the American Fur Company, the Crows attacked him within a year, stealing everything that he possessed.

PART II

CHAPTER IX

THE TAKING OF THE BEAVER

ALL summer long he had hung about the fur company trading-posts waiting for the signs.

And now the signs had come.

Foliage crimson to the touch of night-frosts. Crisp autumn days, spicy with the smell of nuts and dead leaves. Birds flying away southward, leaving the woods silent as the snow-padded surface of a frozen pond. Hoar-frost heavier every morning; and thin ice edged round stagnant pools like layers of mica.

Then he knew it was time to go. And through the Northern forests moved a new presence—the trapper.

Of the tawdry, flash clothing in which popular fancy is wont to dress him he has none. Bright colours would be a danger-signal to game. If his costume has any colour, it is a waist-belt or neck-scarf, a toque or bright handkerchief round his head to keep distant hunters from mistaking him for a moose. For the rest, his clothes are as ragged as any old, weather-worn garments. Sleeping on balsam boughs or cooking over a smoky fire will reduce the newness of blanket coat and buckskin jacket to the dun shades of the grizzled forest. A few days in the open and the trapper has the complexion of a bronzed tree-trunk.

Like other wild creatures, this foster-child of the forest gradually takes on the appearance and habits of woodland life. Nature protects the ermine by turning his russet coat of the grass season to spotless white for midwinter—except the jet tail-tip left to lure hungry enemies and thus, perhaps, to prevent the little stoat degenerating into a sloth. And the forest looks after her foster-child by transforming the smartest suit that ever stepped out of the clothier's bandbox to the dull tints of winter woods.

This is the seasoning of the man for the work.
But the trapper's training does not stop here.

When the birds have gone south the silence of a winter forest on a windless day becomes tense enough to be snapped by either a man's breathing or the breaking of a small twig; and the trapper acquires a habit of moving through the brush with noiseless stealth. He must learn to see better than the caribou can hear or the wolf smell—which means that in keenness and accuracy his sight outdistances the average field-glass. Besides, the trapper has learned how to look, how to see, and seeing—discern; which the average man cannot do even through a field-glass. Then animals have a trick of deceiving the enemy into mistaking them for inanimate things by suddenly standing stock-still in closest peril, unflinching as stone; and to match himself against them the trapper must also get the knack of instantaneously becoming a statue, though he feel the clutch of bruin's five-inch claws.

And these things are only the *a b c* of the trapper's woodcraft.

One of the best hunters in America confessed that the longer he trapped the more he thought every animal

different enough from the fellows of its kind to be a species by itself. Each day was a fresh page in the book of forest-lore.

It is in the month of May-goosey-geezee, the Ojibways' trout month, corresponding to the late October and early November of the white man, that the trapper sets out through the illimitable stretches of the forest land and waste prairie south of Hudson Bay, between Labrador and the Upper Missouri.

His birch canoe has been made during the summer. Now, splits and seams, where the bark crinkles at the gunwale, must be filled with rosin and pitch. A light sled, with only runners and cross frame, is made to haul the canoe over still water, where the ice first forms. Sled, provisions, blanket, and fish-net are put in the canoe, not forgetting the most important part of his kit—the trapper's tools. Whether he hunts from point to point all winter, travelling light and taking nothing but absolute necessities, or builds a central lodge, where he leaves full store and radiates out to the hunting-grounds, at least four things must be in his tool-bag: a woodman's axe; a gimlet to bore holes in his snow-shoe frame; a crooked knife—not the sheathed dagger of fiction, but a blade crooked hook-shape, somewhat like a farrier's knife, at one end—to smooth without splintering, as a carpenter's plane; and a small chisel to use on the snow-shoe frames and wooden contrivances that stretch the pelts.

If accompanied by a boy, who carries half the pack, the hunter may take more tools; but the old trapper prefers to travel light. Fire-arms, ammunition, a common hunting-knife, steel-traps, a cotton-factory tepee, a large sheet of canvas, locally known as *abuckwan*, for





With eye and ear alert the man paddles silently on.

(See page 105.)

a shed tent, complete the trapper's equipment. His dog is not part of the equipment: it is fellow-hunter and companion.

From the moose must come the heavy filling for the snow-shoes; but the snow-shoes will not be needed for a month, and there is no haste about shooting an unfound moose while mink and musk-rat and otter and beaver are waiting to be trapped. With the dog showing his wisdom by sitting motionless as an Indian bowman, the trapper steps into his canoe and pushes out.

Eye and ear alert for sign of game or feeding-place, where traps would be effective, the man paddles silently on. If he travels after nightfall, the chances are his craft will steal unawares close to a black head above a swimming body. With both wind and current meeting the canoe, no suspicion of his presence catches the scent of the sharp-nosed swimmer. Otter or beaver, it is shot from the canoe. With a leap over bow or stern—over his master's shoulder if necessary, but never sideways, lest the rebound cause an upset—the dog brings back his quarry. But this is only an aside, the hap-hazard shot of an amateur hunter, not the sort of trapping that fills the company's lofts with fur bales.

While ranging the forest the former season the trapper picked out a large birch-tree, free of knots and underbranching, with the full girth to make the body of a canoe from gunwale to gunwale without any gussets and seams. But birch-bark does not peel well in winter. The trapper scratched the trunk with a mark of "first-finder-first-owner," honoured by all hunters; and came back in the summer for the bark.

Perhaps it was while taking the bark from this tree that he first noticed the traces of beaver. Channels, broader than runnels, hardly as wide as a ditch, have been cut connecting pool with pool, marsh with lake. Here are runways through the grass, where beaver have dragged young saplings five times their own length to a winter storehouse near the dam. Trees lie felled miles away from any chopper. Chips are scattered about marked by teeth which the trapper knows—knows, perhaps, from having seen his dog's tail taken off at a nip, or his own finger amputated almost before he felt it. If the bark of a tree has been nibbled around, like the line a chopper might make before cutting, the trapper guesses whether his coming has not interrupted a beaver in the very act.

All these are signs which spell out the presence of a beaver-dam within one night's travelling distance; for the timid beaver frequently works at night, and will not go so far away that forage cannot be brought in before daylight. In which of the hundred water-ways in the labyrinth of pond and stream where beavers roam is this particular family to be found?

Realizing that his own life depends on the life of the game, no true trapper will destroy wild creatures when the mothers are caring for their young. Besides, furs are not at their prime when birch-bark is peeled, and the trapper notes the place, so that he may come back when the fall hunt begins. Beaver kittens stay under the parental roof for three years, but at the end of the first summer are amply able to look after their own skins. Free from nursery duties, the old ones can now use all the ingenuity and craft which nature gave them for self-protection. When cold weather comes

the beaver is fair game to the trapper. It is wit against wit. To be sure, the man has superior strength, a gun, and a treacherous thing called a trap. But his eyes are not equal to the beaver's nose. And he hasn't that familiarity with the woods to enable him to pursue, which the beaver has to enable it to escape. And he can't swim long enough under water to throw enemies off the scent, the way the beaver does.

Now, as he paddles along the network of streams which interlace Northern forests, he will hardly be likely to stumble on the beaver-dam of last summer. Beavers do not build their houses where passers-by will stumble upon them. But all the streams have been swollen by fall rains; and the trapper notices the markings on every chip and pole floating down the full current. A chip swirls past white and fresh cut. He knows that the rains have floated it over the beaver-dam. Beavers never cut below their houses, but always above, so that the current will carry the poles downstream to the dam.

Leaving his canoe-load behind, the trapper guardedly advances within sight of the dam. If any old beaver sentinel be swimming about, he quickly scents the man-smell, upends and dives with a spanking blow of his trowel tail on the water, which heliographs danger to the whole community. He swims with his webbed hind feet, the little fore paws being used as carriers or hanging limply, the flat tail acting the faintest bit in the world like a rudder; but that is a mooted question. The only definitely ascertained function of that bat-shaped appendage is to telegraph danger to comrades. The beaver neither carries things on his tail, nor plasters houses with it; for the simple reason that

the joints of his caudal appurtenance admit of only slight sidelong wigglings and a forward sweep between his hind legs, as if he might use it as a tray for food while he sat back spooning up mouthfuls with his fore paws.

Having found the wattled homes of the beaver, the trapper may proceed in different ways. He may, after the fashion of the Indian hunter, stake the stream across above the dam, cut away the obstruction lowering the water, break the conical crowns of the houses on the south side, which is thinnest, and slaughter the beavers indiscriminately as they rush out. But such hunting kills the goose that lays the golden egg; and explains why it was necessary to prohibit the killing of beaver for some years. In the confusion of a wild scramble to escape and a blind clubbing of heads there was bootless destruction. Old and young, poor and in prime, suffered the same fate. The house had been destroyed; and if one beaver chanced to escape into some of the bank-holes under water or up the side channels, he could be depended upon to warn all beaver from that country. Only the degenerate white man practises bad hunting.

The skilled hunter has other methods.

If unstripped saplings be yet about the bank of the stream, the beavers have not finished laying up their winter stores in adjacent pools. The trapper gets one of his steel-traps. Attaching the ring of this to a loose trunk heavy enough to hold the beaver down and drown him, he places the trap a few inches under water at the end of a runway or in one of the channels. He then takes out a bottle of castoreum. This is a substance from the glands of a beaver which destroys all

traces of the man-smell. For it the beavers have a curious infatuation, licking everything touched by it, and said, by some hunters, to be drugged into a crazy stupidity by the very smell. The hunter daubs this on his own foot-tracks.

Or, if he finds tracks of the beaver in the grass back from the bank, he may build an old-fashioned deadfall, with which the beaver is still taken in Labrador. This is the small lean-to, with a roof of branches and bark—usually covered with snow—slanting to the ground on one side, the ends either posts or logs, and the front an opening between two logs wide enough to admit half the animal's body. Inside, at the back, on a rectangular stick, one part of which bolsters up the front log, is the bait. All traces of the hunter are smeared over with the elusive castoreum. One tug at the bait usually brings the front log crashing down across the animal's back, killing it instantly.

But neither the steel-trap nor the deadfall is wholly satisfactory. When the poor beaver comes sniffing along the castoreum trail to the steel-trap and on the first splash into the water feels a pair of iron jaws close on his feet, he dives below to try and gain the shelter of his house. The log plunges after him, holding him down and back till he drowns; and his whereabouts are revealed by the upend of the tree.

But several chances are in the beaver's favour. With the castoreum licks, which tell them of some other beaver, perhaps looking for a mate or lost cub, they may become so exhilarated as to jump clear of the trap. Or, instead of diving down with the trap, they may retreat back up the bank and amputate the imprisoned foot with one nip, leaving only a mutilated

paw for the hunter. With the deadfall a small beaver may have gone entirely inside the snare before the front log falls; and an animal whose teeth saw through logs eighteen inches in diameter in less than half an hour can easily eat a way of escape from a wooden trap. Other things are against the hunter. A wolverine may arrive on the scene before the trapper and eat the finest beaver ever taken; or the trapper may discover that his victim is a poor little beaver with worthless, ragged fur, who should have been left to forage for three or four years.

All these risks can be avoided by waiting till the ice is thick enough for the trapper to cut trenches. Then he returns with a woodman's axe and his dog. By sounding the ice, he can usually find where holes have been hollowed out of the banks. Here he drives stakes to prevent the beaver taking refuge in the shore vaults. The runways and channels, where the beaver have dragged trees, may be hidden in snow and iced over; but the man and his dog will presently find them.

The beaver always chooses a stream deep enough not to be frozen solid, and shallow enough for it to make a mud foundation for the house without too much work. Besides, in a deep, swift stream, rains would carry away any house the beaver could build. A trench across the upper stream or stakes through the ice prevent escape that way.

The trapper then cuts a hole in the dam. Falling water warns the terrified colony that an enemy is near. It may be their greatest foe, the wolverine, whose claws will rip through the frost-hard wall as easily as a bear

delves for gophers; but their land enemies cannot pursue them into water; so the panic-stricken family—the old parents, wise from many such alarms; the young three-year-olds, who were to go out and rear families for themselves in the spring; the two-year-old cubbies, big enough to be saucy, young enough to be silly; and the baby kittens, just able to forage for themselves and know the soft alder rind from the tough old bark unpalatable as mud—pop pell-mell from the high platform of their houses into the water. The water is still falling. They will presently be high and dry. No use trying to escape up-stream. They see that in the first minute's wild scurry through the shallows. Besides, what's this across the creek? Stakes, not put there by any beaver; for there is no bark on. If they only had time now they might cut a passage through; but no—this wretched enemy, whatever it is, has ditched the ice across.

They sniff and listen. A terrible sound comes from above—a low, exultant, devilish whining. The man has left his dog on guard above the dam. At that the little beavers—always trembling, timid fellows—tumble over each other in a panic of fear to escape by way of the flowing water below the dam. But there a new terror assails them. A shadow is above the ice, a wraith of destruction—the figure of a man standing at the dam with his axe and club—waiting.

Where to go now? They can't find their bank shelters, for the man has staked them up. The little fellows lose their presence of mind and their heads and their courage, and with a blind scramble dash up the remaining open runway. It is a *cul-de-sac*. But what does that matter? They run almost to the end.

They can crouch there till the awful shadow goes away. Exactly. That is what the man has been counting on. He will come to them afterward.

The old beavers make no such mistake. They have tried the hollow-log trick with an enemy pursuing them to the blind end, and have escaped only because some other beaver was eaten.

The old ones know that water alone is safety.

That is the first and last law of beaver life. They, too, see that phantom destroyer above the ice; but a dash past is the last chance. How many of the beaver escape past the cut in the dam to the water below, depends on the dexterity of the trapper's aim. But certainly, for the most, one blow is the end; and that one blow is less cruel to them than the ravages of the wolf or wolverine in spring, for these begin to eat before they kill.

A signal, and the dog ceases to keep guard above the dam. Where is the runway in which the others are hiding? The dog scampers round aimlessly, but begins to sniff and run in a line and scratch and whimper. The man sees that the dog is on the trail of sagging snow, and the sag betrays ice settling down where a channel has run dry. The trapper cuts a hole across the river end of the runway and drives down stakes. The young beavers are now prisoners.

The human mind can't help wondering why the foolish youngsters didn't crouch below the ice above the dam and lie there in safe hiding till the monster went away. This may be done by the hermit beavers—fellows who have lost their mates and go through life inconsolable; or sick creatures, infested by parasites and turned off to house in the river holes; or fat, selfish

ladies, who don't want the trouble of training a family. Whatever these solitaries are—naturalists and hunters differ—they have the wit to keep alive; but the poor little beavers rush right into the jaws of death. Why do they? For the same reason probably, if they could answer, that people trample each other to death when there is an alarm in a crowd.

They cower in the terrible pen, knowing nothing at all about their hides being valued all the way from fifty cents to three dollars, according to the quality; nothing about the dignity of being a coin of the realm in the Northern wilderness, where one beaver-skin sets the value for mink, otter, marten, bear, and all other skins, one pound of tobacco, one kettle, five pounds of shot, a pint of brandy, and half a yard of cloth; nothing about the rascally Indians long ago bartering forty of their hides for a scrap of iron and a great company sending one hundred thousand beaver-skins in a single year to make hats and cloaks for the courtiers of Europe; nothing about the laws of man forbidding the killing of beaver till their number increase.

All the little beaver remembers is that it opened its eyes to daylight in the time of soft, green grasses; and that as soon as it got strong enough on a milk diet to travel, the mother led the whole family of kittens—usually three or four—down the slanting doorway of their dim house for a swim; and that she taught them how to nibble the dainty, green shrubs along the bank; and then the entire colony went for the most glorious, pell-mell splash up-stream to fresh ponds. No more sleeping in that stifling lodge; but beds in soft grass like a goose-nest all night, and tumbling in the water

all day, diving for the roots of the lily-pads. But the old mother is always on guard, for the wolves and bears are ravenous in spring. Soon the cubs can cut the hardening bark of alder and willow as well as their two-year-old brothers; and the wonderful thing is—if a tooth breaks, it grows into perfect shape inside of a week.

By August the little fellows are great swimmers, and the colony begins the descent of the stream for their winter home. If unmolested, the old dam is chosen; but if the hated man-smell is there, new waterways are sought. Burrows and washes and channels and retreats are cleaned out. Trees are cut and a great supply of branches laid up for winter store near the lodge, not a chip of edible bark being wasted. Just before the frost they begin building or repairing the dam. Each night's frost hardens the plastered clay till the conical wattled roof—never more than two feet thick—will support the weight of a moose.

All work is done with mouth and fore paws, and not the tail. This has been finally determined by observing the Marquis of Bute's colony of beavers. If the family—the old parents and three seasons' offspring—be too large for the house, new chambers are added. In height the house is seldom more than five feet from the base, and the width varies. In building a new dam they begin under water, scooping out clay, mixing this with stones and sticks for the walls, and hollowing out the dome as it rises, like a coffer-dam, except that man pumps out water and the beaver scoops out mud. The domed roof is given layer after layer of clay till it is cold-proof. Whether the houses have one door or two is disputed; but the door is always at

the end of a sloping incline away from the land side, with a shelf running round above, which serves as the living-room. Differences in the houses, breaks below water, two doors instead of one, platforms like an oven instead of a shelf, are probably explained by the continual abrasion of the current. By the time the ice forms the beavers have retired to their houses for the winter, only coming out to feed on their winter stores and get an airing.

But this terrible thing has happened; and the young beavers huddle together under the ice of the canal, bleating with the cry of a child. They are afraid to run back; for the crunch of feet can be heard. They are afraid to go forward; for the dog is whining with a glee that is fiendish to the little beavers. Then a gust of cold air comes from the rear and a pole prods forward.

The man has opened a hole to feel where the hiding beavers are, and with little terrified yelps they scuttle to the very end of the runway. By this time the dog is emitting howls of triumph. For hours he has been boxing up his wolfish ferocity, and now he gives vent by scratching with a zeal that would burrow to the middle of earth.

The trapper drives in more stakes close to the blind end of the channel, and cuts a hole above the prison of the beaver. He puts down his arm. One by one they are dragged out by the tail; and that finishes the little beaver—sacrificed, like the guinea-pigs and rabbits of bacteriological laboratories, to the necessities of man. Only, this death is swifter and less painful. A prolonged death-struggle with the beaver would probably rob the trapper of half his fingers. Very

often the little beavers with poor fur are let go. If the dog attempts to capture the frightened runaways by catching at the conspicuous appendage to the rear, that dog is likely to emerge from the struggle minus a tail, while the beaver runs off with two.

Trappers have curious experiences with beaver kittens which they take home as pets. When young they are as easily domesticated as a cat, and become a nuisance with their love of fondling. But to them, as to the hunter, comes what the Indians call "the-sickness-of-long-thinking," the gipsy yearning for the wilds. Then extraordinary things happen. The beaver are apt to avenge their comrades' death. One old beaver trapper of New Brunswick related that by June the beavers became so restless, he feared their escape and put them in cages. They bit their way out with absurd ease.

He then tried log pens. They had eaten a hole through in a night. Thinking to get wire caging, he took them into his lodge, and they seemed contented enough while he was about; but one morning he wakened to find a hole eaten through the door, and the entire round of birch-bark, which he had staked out ready for the gunwales and ribbing of his canoe—bark for which he had travelled forty miles—chewed into shreds. The beavers had then gone up-stream, which is their habit in spring.

CHAPTER X

THE MAKING OF THE MOCCASINS

IT is a grim joke of the animal world that the lazy moose is the moose that gives wings to the feet of the pursuer. When snow comes the trapper must have snow-shoes and moccasins. For both, moose supplies the best material.

Bees have their drones, beaver their hermits, and moose a ladified epicure who draws off from the feeding-yards of the common herd, picks out the sweetest browse of the forest, and gorges herself till fat as a gouty voluptuary. While getting the filling for his snow-shoes, the trapper also stocks his larder; and if he can find a spinster moose, he will have something better than shredded venison and more delicately flavoured than finest teal.

Sledding his canoe across shallow lakelets, now frozen like rock, still paddling where there is open way, the trapper continues to guide his course up the waterways. Big game, he knows, comes out to drink at sunrise and sunset; and nearly all the small game frequents the banks of streams either to fish or to prey on the fisher.

Each night he sleeps in the open with his dog on guard; or else puts up the cotton tepee, the dog curling outside the tent flap, one ear awake. And each

night a net is set for the white-fish that are to supply breakfast, feed the dog, and provide heads for the traps placed among rocks in mid-stream, or along banks where dainty footprints were in the morning's hoarfrost. Brook trout can still be got in the pools below waterfalls; but the trapper seldom takes time now to use the line, depending on his gun and fish-net.

During the Indian's white-fish month—the white man's November—the weather has become colder and colder; but the trapper never indulges in the big log fire that delights the heart of the amateur hunter. That would drive game a week's tracking from his course. Unless he wants to frighten away nocturnal prowlers, a little, chip fire, such as the fishermen of the Banks use in their dories, is all the trapper allows himself.

First snow silences the rustling leaves. First frost quiets the flow of waters. Except for the occasional splitting of a sap-frozen tree, or the far howl of a wolf-pack, there is the stillness of death. And of all quiet things in the quiet forest, the trapper is the quietest.

As winter closes in the ice-skim of the large lakes cuts the bark canoe like a knife. The canoe is abandoned for snow-shoes and the cotton tepee for more substantial shelter.

If the trapper is a white man he now builds a lodge near the best hunting-ground he has found. Around this he sets a wide circle of traps at such distances their circuit requires an entire day, and leads the trapper out in one direction and back in another, without retracing the way. Sometimes such lodges run from valley to valley. Each cabin is stocked; and the hunter

sleeps where night overtakes him. But this plan needs two men; for if the traps are not closely watched, the wolverine will rifle away a priceless fox as readily as he eats a worthless musk-rat. The stone fire-place stands at one end. Moss, clay, and snow chink up the logs. Parchment across a hole serves as window. Poles and brush make the roof, or perhaps the remains of the cotton tent stretched at a steep angle to slide off the accumulating weight of snow.

But if the trapper is an Indian, or the white man has a messenger to carry the pelts marked with his name to a friendly trading-post, he may not build a lodge; but move from hunt to hunt as the game changes feeding-ground. In this case he uses the *abuckwan*—canvas—for a shed tent, with one side sloping to the ground, banked by brush and snow, the other facing the fire, both tent and fire on such a slope that the smoke drifts out while the heat reflects in. Pine and balsam boughs, with the wood end pointing out like sheaves in a stood, the foliage converging to a soft centre, form the trapper's bed.

The snow is now too deep to travel without snow-shoes. The frames for these the trapper makes of ash, birch, or best of all, the *mackikwatick*—tamarack—curving the easily bent green wood up at one end, canoe shape, and smoothing the barked wood at the bend, like a sleigh runner, by means of the awkward *couteau croche*, as the French hunter calls his crooked knife.

In style, the snow-shoe varies with the hunting-ground. On forested, rocky, hummocky land, the shoe is short to permit short turns without entanglement. Oval and broad, rather than long and slim, it makes

up in width what it lacks in length to support the hunter's weight above the snow. And the toe curve is slight; for speed is impossible on bad ground. To save the instep from jars, the slip noose may be padded like a cowboy's stirrup.

On the prairie, where the snowy reaches are unbroken as air, snow-shoes are wings to the hunter's heels. They are long, and curved, and narrow, and smooth enough on the runners for the hunter to sit on their rear ends and coast downhill as on a toboggan. If a snag is struck midway, the racquets may bounce safely over and glissade to the bottom; or the toe may catch, heels fly over head, and the hunter land with his feet noosed in frames sticking upright higher than his neck.

Any trapper can read the story of a hunt from snow-shoes. Round and short: east of the Great Lakes. Slim and long: from the prairie. Padding for the instep: either rock ground or long runs. Filling of hide strips with broad enough interspaces for a small foot to slip through: from the wet, heavily packed, snow region of the Atlantic coast, for trapping only, never the chase, small game, not large. Lace ties, instead of a noose to hold the foot: the amateur hunter. *Atibisc*, a fine filling taken from deer or caribou for the heel and toe; with *askimoneiab*, heavy, closely interlaced, membranous filling from the moose across the centre to bear the brunt of wear; long enough for speed, short enough to turn short: the trapper knows he is looking at the snow-shoe of the craftsman. This is the sort he must have for himself.

The first thing, then—a moose for the heavy filling; preferably a spinster moose; for she is too lazy

to run from a hunter who is not yet a Mercury; and she will furnish him with a banquet fit for kings.

Neither moose call nor birch horn, of which wonders are told, will avail now. The mating season is well past. Even if an old moose responded to the call, the chances are his flesh would be unfit for food. It would be a wasted kill, contrary to the principles of the true trapper.

Every animal has a sign language as plain as print. The trapper has hardly entered the forest before he begins to read this language. Broad hoof-marks are on the muskeg—quaking bog, covered with moss—over which the moose can skim as if on snow-shoes, where a horse would sink to the saddle. Park-like glades at the heads of streams, where the moose have spent the summer browsing on twigs and wallowing in water holes to get rid of sand flies, show trampled brush and stripped twigs and rubbed bark.

Coming suddenly on a grove of quaking aspens, a saucy jay has fluttered up with a noisy call—an alarm note; and something is bounding off to hiding in a thicket on the far side of the grove. The *wis-kat-jan*, or whisky jack, as the white men call it, who always hangs about the moose herds, has seen the trapper and sounded the alarm.

In August, when the great, palmated horns, which budded out on the male in July, are yet in the velvet, the trapper finds scraps of furry hair sticking to young saplings. The vain moose has been polishing his antlers, preparatory to mating. Later, there is a great whacking of horns among the branches. The moose, spoiling for a fight, in moose language is challenging

his rivals to battle. Wood-choppers have been interrupted by the apparition of a huge, palmated head through a thicket. Mistaking the axe for his rival's defiance, the moose arrives on the scene in a mood of blind rage that sends the chopper up a tree, or back to the shanty for his rifle.

But the trapper allows these opportunities to pass. He is not ready for his moose until winter compels the abandoning of the canoe. Then the moose herds are yarding up in some sheltered feeding-ground.

It is not hard for the trapper to find a moose yard. There is the tell-tale cleft footprint in the snow. There are the cast-off antlers after the battles have been fought—the female moose being without horns and entirely dependent on speed and hearing and smell for protection. There is the stripped, overhead twig, where a moose has reared on hind legs and nibbled a branch above. There is the bent or broken sapling which a moose pulled down with his mouth and then held down with his feet while he browsed. This and more sign language of the woods—too fine for the language of man—lead the trapper close on the haunts of a moose herd. But he does not want an ordinary moose. He is keen for the solitary track of a haughty spinster. And he probably comes on the print when he has almost made up his mind to chance a shot at one of the herd below the hill, where he hides. He knows the trail is that of a spinster. It is unusually heavy; and she is always fat. It drags clumsily over the snow; for she is lazy. And it doesn't travel straight away in a line like that of the roving moose; for she loiters to feed and dawdle out of pure indolence.

And now the trapper knows how a hound on a hot

scent feels. He may win his prize with the ease of putting out his hand and taking it—sighting his rifle and touching the trigger. Or, by the blunder of a hair's breadth, he may daily track twenty weary miles for a week and come back empty at his cartridge-belt, empty below his cartridge-belt, empty of hand, and full, full of rage at himself, though his words curse the moose. He may win his prize in one of two ways: (1) by running the game to earth from sheer exhaustion; (2) or by a still hunt.

The straightaway hunt is more dangerous to the man than the moose. Even a fat spinster can outdistance a man with no snow-shoes. And if his perseverance lasts longer than her strength—for though a moose swings out in a long-stepping, swift trot, it is easily tired—the exhausted moose is a moose at bay; and a moose at bay rears on her hind legs and does defter things with the flattening blow of her fore feet than an exhausted man can do with a gun. The blow of a cleft hoof means something sharply split, wherever that spreading hoof lands. And if the something wriggles on the snow in death-throes, the moose pounds upon it with all four feet till the thing is still. Then she goes on her way with eyes ablaze and every shaggy hair bristling.

The contest was even and the moose won.

Apart from the hazard, there is a barbarism about this straightaway chase, which repels the trapper. It usually succeeds by bogging the moose in crusted snow, or a waterhole—and then, Indian fashion, a slaughter; and no trapper kills for the sake of killing, for the simple practical reason that his own life depends on the preservation of game.

A slight snowfall and the wind in his face are ideal conditions for a still hunt. One conceals him. The other carries the man-smell from the game.

Which way does the newly-discovered footprint run? More flakes are in one hole than the other. He follows the trail till he has an idea of the direction the moose is taking; for the moose runs straightaway, not circling and doubling back on cold tracks like the deer, but marching direct to the objective point, where it turns, circles slightly—a loop at the end of a line—and lies down a little off the trail. When the pursuer, following the cold scent, runs past, the moose gets wind and is off in the opposite direction like a vanishing streak.

Having ascertained the lie of the land, the trapper leaves the line of direct trail and follows in a circling detour. Here, he finds the print fresher, not an hour old. The moose had stopped to browse and the markings are moist on a twig. The trapper leaves the trail, advancing always by a detour to leeward. He is sure, now, that it is a spinster. If it had been any other, the moose would not have been alone. The rest would be tracking into the leader's steps; and by the fresh trail he knows for a certainty there is only one. But his very nearness increases the risk. The wind may shift. The snowfall is thinning. This time, when he comes back to the trail, it is fresher still. The hunter now gets his rifle ready. He dare not put his foot down without testing the snow, lest a twig snap. He parts a way through the brush with his hand and replaces every branch. And when next he comes back to the line of the moose's travel, there is no trail. This is what he expected. He takes off his coat; his leggings,

if they are loose enough to rub with a leathery swish; his musk-rat fur cap, if it has any conspicuous colour; his boots, if they are noisy and given to crunching. If only he aim true, he will have moccasins soon enough. Leaving all impedimenta, he follows back on his own steps to the place where he last saw the trail. Perhaps the saucy jay cries with a shrill, scolding shriek that sends cold shivers down the trapper's spine. He wishes he could get his hands on its wretched little neck; and turning himself to a statue, he stands stone-still till the troublesome bird settles down. Then he goes on.

Here is the moose trail!

He dare not follow direct. That would lead past her hiding-place and she would bolt. He resorts to artifice; but, for that matter, so has the moose resorted to artifice. The trapper, too, circles forward, cutting the moose's magic guard with transverse zigzags. But he no longer walks. He crouches, or creeps, or glides noiselessly from shelter to shelter, very much the way a cat advances on an unwary mouse. He sinks to his knees and feels forward for snow-pads every pace. Then he is on all-fours, still circling. His detour has narrowed and narrowed till he knows she must be in that aspen thicket. The brush is sparser. She has chosen her resting-ground wisely. The man falls forward on his face, closing in, closing in, wiggling and watching till—he makes a horrible discovery. That jay is perched on the topmost bough of the grove; and the man has caught a glimpse of something buff-coloured behind the aspens. It may be a moose, or only a log. The untried hunter would fire. Not so the trapper. Hap-hazard aim means fighting a wounded moose, or letting the creature drag its agony off to inaccessible

haunts. The man worms his way round the thicket, sighting the game with the noiseless circling of a hawk before the drop. An ear blinks. But at that instant the jay perks his head to one side with a curious look at this strange object on the ground. In another second it will be off with a call and the moose up.

His rifle is aimed!

A blinding swish of aspen leaves and snow and smoke! The jay is off with a noisy whistle. And the trapper has leather for moccasins, and heavy filling for his snow-shoes, and meat for his larder.

But he must still get the fine filling for heel and toe; and this comes from caribou or deer. The deer, he will still hunt as he has still hunted the moose, with this difference: that the deer runs in circles, jumping back in his own tracks leaving the hunter to follow a cold scent, while it, by a sheer bound—five—eight—twenty feet off at a new angle, makes for the hiding of dense woods. No one but a barbarian would attempt to run down a caribou; for it can only be done by the shameless trick of snaring in crusted snow, or intercepting while swimming, and then—butchery.

The caribou doesn't run. It doesn't bound. It floats away into space.

One moment a sandy-coloured form, with black nose, black feet, and a glory of white statuary above its head, is seen against the far reaches of snow. The next, the form has shrunk—and shrunk—and shrunk, antlers laid back against its neck, till there is a vanishing speck on the horizon. The caribou has not been standing at all. It has skimmed out of sight; and if there is any clear ice across the marshes, it literally

glides beyond vision from very speed. But, provided no man-smell crosses its course, the caribou is vulnerable in its habits. Morning and evening, it comes back to the same watering-place; and it returns to the same bed for the night. If the trapper can conceal himself without crossing its trail, he easily obtains the fine filling for his snow-shoes.

Moccasins must now be made.

The trapper shears off the coarse hair with a sharp knife. The hide is soaked; and a blunter blade tears away the remaining hairs till the skin is white and clean. The flesh side is similarly cleaned and the skin rubbed with all the soap and grease it will absorb. A process of beating follows till the hide is limber. Carelessness at this stage makes buckskin soak up water like a sponge and dry to a shapeless board. The skin must be stretched and pulled till it will stretch no more. Frost helps the tanning, drying all moisture out; and the skin becomes as soft as down, without a crease. The smoke of punk from a rotten tree gives the dark yellow colour to the hide and prevents hardening. The skin is now ready for the needle; and all odd bits are hoarded away.

Equipped with moccasins and snow-shoes, the trapper is now the winged messenger of the tragic fates to the forest world.

CHAPTER XI

THE INDIAN TRAPPER

IT is dawn when the Indian trapper leaves his lodge.

In midwinter of the Far North, dawn comes late. Stars, which shine with a hard, clear, crystal radiance only seen in northern skies, pale in the gray morning gloom; and the sun comes over the horizon dim through mists of frost-smoke. In an hour the frost-mist, lying thick to the touch like clouds of steam, will have cleared; and there will be nothing from sky-line to sky-line but blinding sunlight and snowglare.

The Indian trapper must be far afield before midday. Then the sun casts no man-shadow to scare game from his snares. Black is the flag of betrayal in northern midwinter. It is by the big liquid eye, glistening on the snow like a black marble, that the trapper detects the white hare; and a jet tail-tip streaking over the white wastes in dots and dashes tells him the little ermine, whose coat must line some emperor's coronation robe, is alternately scudding over the drifts and diving below the snow with the forward wriggling of a snake under cover. But the moving man-shadow is bigger and plainer on the snow than the hare's eye or the ermine's jet tip; so the Indian trapper sets out in the gray darkness of morning and must reach his hunting-grounds before high noon.

With long snow-shoes, that carry him over the drifts in swift, coasting strides, he swings out in that easy, ambling, Indian trot, which gives never a jar to the runner, nor rests long enough for the snows to crunch beneath his tread.

The old musket, which he got in trade from the fur post, is over his shoulder, or swinging lightly in one hand. A hunter's knife and short-handled wood-man's axe hang through the beaded scarf, belting in his loose, caribou capote. Powder-horn and heavy musk-rat gantlets are attached to the cord about his neck; so without losing either he can fight bare-handed, free and in motion, at a moment's notice. And somewhere, in side pockets or hanging down his back, is his *skipertogan*—a skin bag with amulet against evil, matches, touchwood, and a scrap of pemmican. As he grows hot, he throws back his hood, running bare-headed and loose about the chest.

Each breath clouds to frost against his face till hair and brows and lashes are fringed with frozen moisture. The white man would hugger his face up with scarf and collar the more for this; but the Indian knows better. Suddenly chilled breath would soak scarf and collar wet to his skin; and his face would be frozen before he could go five paces. But with dry skin and quickened blood, he can defy the keenest cold; so he loosens his coat and runs the faster.

As the light grows, dim forms shape themselves in the gray haze. Pine groves emerge from the dark, wreathed and festooned in snow. Cones and domes and cornices of snow heap the underbrush and spreading larch boughs. Evergreens are edged with white. Naked trees stand like limned statuary with an ant-

lered crest etched against the white glare. The snow stretches away in a sea of billowed, white drifts that seem to heave and fall to the motions of the runner, mounting and coasting and skimming over the unbroken waste like a bird winging the ocean. And against this endless stretch of drifts billowing away to a boundless circle, of which the man is the centre, his form is dwarfed out of all proportion, till he looks no larger than a bird above the sea.

When the sun rises, strange colour effects are caused by the frost haze. Every shrub takes fire; for the ice drops are a prism, and the result is the same as if there had been a star shower or rainfall of brilliants. Does the Indian trapper see all this? The white man with white man arrogance doubts whether his tawny brother of the wilds sees the beauty about him, because the Indian has no white man's terms of expression. But ask the bronzed trapper the time of day; and he tells you by the length of shadow the sun casts, or the degree of light on the snow. Inquire the season of the year; and he knows by the slant sunlight coming up through the frost smoke of the southern horizon. And get him talking about his Happy Hunting-Grounds; and after he has filled it with the implements and creatures and people of the chase, he will describe it in the metaphor of what he has seen at sunrise and sunset and under the Northern Lights. He does not *see* these things with the gabbling exclamatories of a tourist. He sees them because they sink into his nature and become part of his mental furniture. The most brilliant description the writer ever heard of the Hereafter was from an old Cree squaw, toothless, wrinkled like leather, belted at the waist

like a sack of wool, with hands of dried parchment, and moccasins some five months too odoriferous. Her version ran that Heaven would be full of the music of running waters and south winds; that there would always be warm gold sunlight like a midsummer afternoon, with purple shadows, where tired women could rest; that the trees would be covered with blossoms, and all the pebbles of the shore like dewdrops.

Pushed from the Atlantic seaboard back over the mountains, from the mountains to the Mississippi, west to the Rockies, north to the Great Lakes, all that was to be seen of nature in America the Indian trapper has seen; though he has not understood.

But now he holds only a fringe of hunting-grounds, in the timber lands of the Great Lakes, in the cañons of the Rockies, and across that northern land which converges to Hudson Bay, reaching west to Athabasca, east to Labrador. It is in the basin of Hudson Bay regions that the Indian trapper will find his last hunting-grounds. Here climate excludes the white man, and game is plentiful. Here Indian trappers were snaring before Columbus opened the doors of the New World to the hordes of the Old; and here Indian trappers will hunt as long as the race lasts. When there is no more game, the Indian's doom is sealed; but that day is far distant for the Hudson Bay region.

The Indian trapper has set few large traps. It is midwinter; and by December there is a curious lull in the hunting. All the streams are frozen like rock; but the otter and pekan and mink and marten have not yet begun to forage at random across open field. Some foolish fish always dilly-dally up-stream till the ice

shuts them in. Then a strange thing is seen—a kettle of living fish; fish gasping and panting in ice-hemmed water that is gradually lessening as each day's frost freezes another layer to the ice walls of their prison. The banks of such a pond hole are haunted by the otter and his fisher friends. By-and-bye, when the pond is exhausted, these lazy fishers must leave their safe bank and forage across country. Meanwhile, they are quiet.

The bear, too, is still. After much wandering and fastidious choosing—for in trapper vernacular the bear takes a long time to please himself—bruin found an upturned stump. Into the hollow below he clawed grasses. Then he curled up with his nose on his toes and went to sleep under a snow blanket of gathering depth. Deer, moose, and caribou, too, have gone off to their feeding-grounds. Unless they are scattered by a wolf-pack or a hunter's gun, they will not be likely to move till this ground is eaten over. Nor are many beaver seen now. They have long since snuggled into their warm houses, where they will stay till their winter store is all used; and their houses are now hidden under great depths of deepening snow. But the fox and the hare and the ermine are at run; and as long as they are astir, so are their rampant enemies, the lynx and the wolverine and the wolf-pack, all ravenous from the scarcity of other game and greedy as spring crows.

That thought gives wings to the Indian trapper's heels. The pelt of a coyote—or prairie wolf—would scarcely be worth the taking. Even the big, gray timber-wolf would hardly be worth the cost of the shot, except for service as a tepee mat. The white arctic wolf would bring better price. The enormous black or brown arctic wolf would be more valuable; but the

value would not repay the risk of the hunt. But all these worthless, ravening rascals are watching the traps as keenly as the trapper does ; and would eat up a silver fox, that would be the fortune of any hunter.

The Indian comes to the brush where he has set his rabbit snares across a runway. His dog sniffs the ground, whining. The crust of the snow is broken by a heavy tread. The twigs are all trampled and rabbit fur is fluffed about. The game has been rifled away. The Indian notices several things. The rabbit has been devoured on the spot. That is unlike the wolverine. He would have carried snare, rabbit and all off for a guzzle in his own lair. The footprints have the appearance of having been brushed over ; so the thief had a bushy tail. It is not the lynx. There is no trail away from the snare. The marauder has come with a long leap and gone with a long leap. The Indian and his dog make a circuit of the snare till they come on the trail of the intruder ; and its size tells the Indian whether his enemy be fox or wolf.

He sets no more snares across that runway, for the rabbits have had their alarm. Going through the brush he finds a fresh runway and sets a new snare.

Then his snow-shoes are winging him over the drifts to the next trap. It is a deadfall. Nothing is in it. The bait is untouched and the trap left undisturbed. A wolverine would have torn the thing to atoms from very wickedness, chewed the bait in two, and spat it out lest there should be poison. The fox would have gone in and had his back broken by the front log. And there is the same brush work over the trampled snow, as if the visitor had tried to sweep out his own trail ; and the same long leap away, clearing ob-

struction of log and drift, to throw a pursuer off the scent. This time the Indian makes two or three circuits; but the snow is so crusted it is impossible to tell whether the scratchings lead out to the open or back to the border of snow-drifted woods. If the animal had followed the line of the traps by running just inside the brush, the Indian would know. But the midwinter day is short, and he has no time to explore the border of the thicket.

Perhaps he has a circle of thirty traps. Of that number he hardly expects game in more than a dozen. If six have a prize, he has done well. Each time he stops to examine a trap he must pause to cover all trace of the man-smell, daubing his own tracks with castoreum, or pomatum, or bears' grease; sweeping the snow over every spot touched by his hand; dragging the flesh side of a fresh pelt across his own trail.

Mid-day comes, the time of the short shadow; and the Indian trapper has found not a thing in his traps. He only knows that some daring enemy has dogged the circle of his snares. That means he must kill the marauder, or find new hunting-grounds. If he had doubt about swift vengeance for the loss of a rabbit, he has none when he comes to the next trap. He sees what is too much for words: what entails as great loss to the poor Indian trapper as an exchange crash to the white man. One of his best steel-traps lies a little distance from the pole to which it was attached. It has been jerked up with a great wrench and pulled as far as the chain would go. The snow is trampled and stained and covered with gray fur as soft and silvery as chinchilla. In the trap is a little paw, fresh cut, scarcely frozen. He had caught a silver fox, the fortune of

which hunters dream, as prospectors of gold, and speculators of stocks, and actors of fame. But the wolves, the great, black wolves of the Far North, with eyes full of a treacherous green fire and teeth like tusks, had torn the fur to scraps and devoured the fox not an hour before the trapper came.

He knows now what his enemy is; for he has come so suddenly on their trail he can count four different footprints, and claw-marks of different length. They have fought about the little fox; and some of the smaller wolves have lost fur over it. Then, by the blood-marks, he can tell they have got under cover of the shrub growth to the right.

The Indian says none of the words which the white man might say; but that is nothing to his credit; for just now no words are adequate. But he takes prompt resolution. After the fashion of the old Mosaic law, which somehow is written on the very face of the wilderness as one of its necessities, he decides that only life for life will compensate such loss. The danger of hunting the big, brown wolf—he knows too well to attempt it without help. He will bait his small traps with poison; take out his big, steel wolf traps to-morrow; then with a band of young braves follow the wolf-pack's trail during this lull in the hunting season.

But the animal world knows that old trick of drawing a herring scent across the trail of wise intentions; and of all the animal world, none knows it better than the brown arctic wolf. He carries himself with less of a hang-dog air than his brother wolves, with the same pricking forward of sharp, erect ears, the same crouching trot, the same sneaking, watchful green eyes; but his tail, which is bushy enough to brush out

every trace of his tracks, has not the skulking droop of the gray wolf's; and in size he is a giant among wolves.

The trapper shoulders his musket again, and keeping to the open, where he can travel fast on the long snow-shoes, sets out for the next trap. The man-shadow grows longer. It is late in the afternoon. Then all the shadows merge into the purple gloom of early evening; but the Indian travels on; for the circuit of traps leads back to his lodge.

The wolf thief may not be far off; so the man takes his musket from the case. He may chance a shot at the enemy. Where there are woods, wolves run under cover, keeping behind a fringe of brush to windward. The wind carries scent of danger from the open, and the brush forms an ambuscade. Man tracks, where man's dog might scent the trail of a wolf, the wolf clears at a long bound. He leaps over open spaces, if he can; and if he can't, crouches low till he has passed the exposure.

The trapper swings forward in long, straight strides, wasting not an inch of ground, deviating neither to right nor left by as much space as a white man takes to turn on his heels. Suddenly the trapper's dog utters a low whine and stops with ears pricked forward towards the brush. At the same moment the Indian, who has been keeping his eyes on the woods, sees a form rise out of the earth among the shadows. He is not surprised; for he knows the way the wolf travels, and the fox trap could not have been robbed more than an hour ago. The man thinks he has come on the thieves going to the next trap. That is what the wolf means

him to think. And the man, too, dissembles; for as he looks the form fades into the gloom, and he decides to run on parallel to the brushwood, with his gun ready. Just ahead is a break in the shrubbery. At the clearing he can see how many wolves there are, and as he is heading home there is little danger.

But at the clearing nothing crosses. The dog dashes off to the woods with wild barking, and the trapper scans the long, white stretch leading back between the bushes to a horizon that is already dim in the steel grays of twilight.

Half a mile down this openway, off the homeward route of his traps, a wolfish figure looms black against the snow—and stands! The dog prances round and round as if he would hold the creature for his master's shot; and the Indian calculates—"After all, there is only one."

What a chance to approach it under cover, as it has approached his traps! The stars are already prickling the blue darkness in cold, steel points; and the Northern Lights are swinging through the gloom like mystic censers to an invisible Spirit, the Spirit of the still, white, wide, northern wastes. It is as clear as day.

One thought of his loss at the fox trap sends the Indian flitting through the underwoods like a hunted partridge. The sharp barkings of the dog increase in fury, and when the trapper emerges in the open, he finds the wolf has straggled a hundred yards farther. That was the meaning of the dog's alarm. Going back to cover, the hunter again advances. But the wolf keeps moving leisurely, and each time the man sights his game it is still out of range for the old-fashioned musket. The man runs faster now, determined to get

abreast of the wolf and utterly heedless of the increasing danger, as each step puts greater distance between him and his lodge. He will pass the wolf, come out in front and shoot.

But when he comes to the edge of the woods to get his aim, there is no wolf, and the dog is barking furiously at his own moonlit shadow. The wolf, after the fashion of his kind, has apparently disappeared into the ground, just as he always seems to rise from the earth. The trapper thinks of the "loup-garou," but no wolf-demon of native legend devoured the very real substance of that fox.

The dog stops barking, gives a whine and skulks to his master's feet, while the trapper becomes suddenly aware of low-crouching forms gliding through the underbrush. Eyes look out of the dark in the flash of green lights from a prism. The figures are in hiding, but the moon is shining with a silvery clearness that throws moving wolf shadows on the snow to the trapper's very feet.

Then the man knows that he has been tricked.

The Indian knows the wolf-pack too well to attempt flight from these sleuths of the forest. He knows, too, one thing that wolves of forest and prairie hold in deadly fear—fire. Two or three shots ring into the darkness followed by a yelping howl, which tells him there is one wolf less, and the others will hold off at a safe distance. Contrary to the woodman's traditions of chopping only on a windy day, the Indian whips out his axe and chops with all his might till he has wood enough for a roaring fire. That will keep the rascals away till the pack goes off in full cry, or daylight comes.

Whittling a limber branch from a sapling, the Indian hastily makes a bow, and shoots arrow after arrow with the tip in flame to high mid-air, hoping to signal the far-off lodges. But the night is too clear. The sky is silver with stars, and moonlight and reflected snowglare, and the Northern Lights flicker and wane and fade and flame with a brilliancy that dims the tiny blaze of the arrow signal. The smoke rising from his fire in a straight column falls at the height of the trees, for the frost lies on the land heavy, palpable, impenetrable. And for all the frost is thick to the touch, the night is as clear as burnished steel. That is the peculiarity of northern cold. The air seems to become absolutely compressed with the cold; but that same cold freezes out and precipitates every particle of floating moisture till earth and sky, moon and stars shine with the glistening of polished metal.

A curious crackling, like the rustling of a flag in a gale, comes through the tightening silence. The intelligent half-breed says this is from the Northern Lights. The white man says it is electric activity in compressed air. The Indian says it is a spirit, and he may mutter the words of the braves in death chant:

“If I die, I die valiant,
I go to death fearless.
I die a brave man.
I go to those heroes who died without fear.”

Hours pass. The trapper gives over shooting fire arrows into the air. He heaps his fire and watches, musket in hand. The light of the moon is white like statuary. The snow is pure as statuary. The snow-edged trees are chiselled clear like statuary; and the

silence is of stone. Only the snap of the blaze, the crackling of the frosted air, the break of a twig back among the brush, where something has moved, and the little, low, smothered barkings of the dog on guard.

By-and-bye the rustling through the brush ceases; and the dog at last lowers his ears and lies quiet. The trapper throws a stick into the woods and sends the dog after it. The dog comes back without any barkings of alarm. The man knows that the wolves have drawn off. Will he wait out that long Northern night? He has had nothing to eat but the piece of pemmican. The heavy frost drowsiness will come presently; and if he falls asleep the fire will go out. An hour's run will carry him home; but to make speed with the snow-shoes he must run in the open, exposed to all watchers.

When an Indian balances motives, the motive of hunger invariably prevails. Pulling up his hood, belting in the caribou coat and kicking up the dog, the trapper strikes out for the open way leading back to the line of his traps, and the hollow where the lodges have been built for shelter against wind. There is another reason for building lodges in a hollow. Sound of the hunter will not carry to the game; but neither will sound of the game carry to the hunter.

And if the game should turn hunter and the man turn hunted! The trapper speeds down the snowy slope, striding, sliding, coasting, vaulting over hummocks of snow, glissading down the drifts, leaping rather than running. The frosty air acts as a conductor to sound, and the frost films come in stings against the face of the man whose eye, ear, and touch are strained for danger. It is the dog that catches the

first breath of peril, uttering a smothered "*woo! woo!*" The trapper tries to persuade himself the alarm was only the far scream of a wolf-hunted lynx; but it comes again, deep and faint, like an echo in a dome. One glance over his shoulder shows him black forms on the snow-crest against the sky.

He has been tricked again, and knows how the fox feels before the dogs in full cry.

The trapper is no longer a man. He is a hunted thing with terror crazing his blood and the sleuth-hounds of the wilds on his trail. Something goes wrong with his snow-shoe. Stooping to right the slip-strings, he sees that the dog's feet have been cut by the snow crust and are bleeding. It is life for life now; the old, hard, inexorable Mosaic law, that has no new dispensation in the northern wilderness, and demands that a beast's life shall not sacrifice a man's.

One blow of his gun and the dog is dead.

The far, faint howl has deepened to a loud, exultant bay. The wolf-pack are in full cry. The man has rounded the open alley between the trees and is speeding down the hillside winged with fear. He hears the pack pause where the dog fell. That gives him respite. The moon is behind, and the man-shadow flits before on the snow like an enemy heading him back. The deep bay comes again, hard, metallic, resonant, nearer! He feels the snow-shoe slipping, but dare not pause. A great drift thrusts across his way and the shadow in front runs slower. They are gaining on him. He hardly knows whether the crunch of snow and pantings for breath are his own or his pursuers'. At the crest of the drift he braces himself and goes to the bottom with the swiftness of a sled on a slide.

The slant moonlight throws another shadow on the snow at his heels.

It is the leader of the pack. The man turns, and tosses up his arms—an Indian trick to stop pursuit. Then he fires. The ravening hunter of man that has been ambushing him half the day rolls over with a piercing howl.

The man is off and away.

If he only had the quick rifle, with which white men and a body-guard of guides hunt down a single quarry, he would be safe enough now. But the old musket is slow loading, and speed will serve him better than another shot.

Then the snow-shoe noose slips completely over his instep to his ankle, throwing the racquet on edge and clogging him back. Before he can right it they are upon him. There is nothing for it now but to face and fight to the last breath. His hood falls back, and he wheels with the moonlight full in his eyes and the Northern Lights waving their mystic flames high overhead. On one side, far away, are the tepee peaks of the lodges; on the other, the solemn, shadowy, snow-wreathed trees, like funeral watchers—watchers of how many brave deaths in a desolate, lonely land where no man raises a cross to him who fought well and died without fear!

The wolf-pack attacks in two ways. In front, by burying the red-gummed fangs in the victim's throat; in the rear, by snapping at sinews of the runner's legs—called hamstringing. Who taught them this devilish ingenuity of attack? The same hard master who teaches the Indian to be as merciless as he is brave—hunger!

Catching the muzzle of his gun, he beats back the





They dodge the coming sweep of the uplifted arm

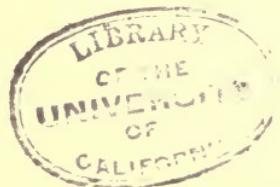
snapping red mouths with the butt of his weapon; and the foremost beasts roll under.

But the wolves are fighting from zest of the chase now, as much as from hunger. Leaping over their dead fellows, they dodge the coming sweep of the uplifted arm, and crouch to spring. A great brute is reaching for the forward bound; but a mean, small wolf sneaks to the rear of the hunter's fighting shadow. When the man swings his arm and draws back to strike, this miserable cur, that could not have worried the trapper's dog, makes a quick snap at the bend of his knees.

Then the trapper's feet give below him. The wolf has bitten the knee sinews to the bone. The pack leap up, and the man goes down.

And when the spring thaw came, to carry away the heavy snow that fell over the northland that night, the Indians travelling to their summer hunting-grounds found the skeleton of a man. Around it were the bones of three dead wolves; and farther up the hill were the bleaching remains of a fourth.*

* A death almost similar to that on the shores of Hudson Bay occurred in the forests of the Boundary, west of Lake Superior, a few years ago. In this case eight wolves were found round the body of the dead trapper, and eight holes were empty in his cartridge-belt—which tells its own story.



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